



Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

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



Summer 2018

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Our Wildlife Biologists

District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

The district has finally gotten dry, with some areas getting critical. However, a big part of the district did receive some much needed rainfall in conjunction with a tropical system out of the gulf in late June. The only parts of the district that didn't get a good dousing were the northern counties such as Bastrop, Lee, and Caldwell. I think most of the district received 2+ inches with 6+ inches in areas south and closer to the coast. Hopefully, you were one of the lucky ones that received a good amount of rain and it will help get you through what is normally a hot dry stretch during July and August.

Biologists have been concentrating on dove trapping and running dove surveys recently. Trapping has started off a bit slow. We're not sure what is causing the decrease in birds coming to bait. We've discussed the possibility that Hurricane Harvey may have had an impact on dove numbers? However, the troops are persistent and should reach their trapping quotas.

The data collected from our mourning and white-wing dove surveys and trapping is used to defend the bag limits and hunting season length we currently maintain. If the United States Fish and Wildlife Service would want to decrease bag limit or reduce the length of the season, we have data to indicate strong numbers. Texas hunters have realized a benefit from the data collected on our white-wing surveys and trapping through the expansion of the white-wing dove zone.



A White-winged dove being released after getting a leg band. Photo@Clint Faas, TPWD.

The June 15th deadline for enrollment in the conservation option in our new Land Management Assistance (LMA) program has passed. Hopefully, if you were interested in that option, you were able to get set up in the new LMA system.

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District Field Notes, continued

If not, get with your local biologist and he/she will help you get set up for next year. The harvest option deadline isn't until September 1st. By being enrolled on June 15th, you are now committed to reporting harvest and management practices for this coming year. Just want to make sure folks are aware of this. We had cases last year where a cooperator didn't get permits or didn't harvest any deer, so didn't think they needed to report anything. Zero is a number, so make sure you document that, if that is the case.

Also, reporting management practices for those in a wildlife management association, hasn't been stressed up to this point in most of the co-ops. We need folks to report at least two (2) wildlife management practices each year along with your harvest. If you have any questions on reporting guidelines, contact your local biologist.

We're entering the dog days of summer and it can sure get oppressive out there at times. However, there's still a lot that can be done early in the morning and late in the evening, so please get out and enjoy the wildlife and habitat on your piece of Texas.



A biologist is processing a Mourning dove for a banding study. Photo©TPWD.



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



Photo©Chase Fountain, TPWD

Recovering America's Wildlife Act Would Bring \$63 Million Per Year to Texas

WRITTEN BY TOM HARVEY, JANICE BEZANSON AND PATRICIA ALLEN

Alliance of Outdoor Conservation, Recreation, Energy, Retail, Academia, Interests Supports 21st-century Wildlife Conservation Funding Proposal



A nationwide alliance of government, business, education and conservation leaders has united to combat one of America's greatest threats—the decline of our fish and wildlife and their natural habitats, and what this means for people and the economy. Scientists estimate that one-third of wildlife species in the United States are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered without additional funding for their conservation.

The Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife, a national group with a sizeable Texas chapter, supports a congressional proposal to create a 21st-century wildlife conservation funding model. This effort grew out of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources, involving members representing the outdoor recreation, retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, conservation organizations, sportsmen's groups and state and federal fish and wildlife agencies.

The bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act, H.R. 4647, introduced by Representatives Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) and Debbie Dingell (D-MI), would redirect \$1.3 billion in existing royalties annually from energy and mineral development on federal lands and waters, money not currently earmarked for any specific fund or purpose. This approach would not require taxpayers or businesses to pay more, but would redirect funds to invest in fish and wildlife conservation. RAWA allocations would follow a formula based on a state's human population size and land area. Texas would receive the maximum allowed, 5 percent, or \$63 million currently. Combined with the required non-federal match of 25 percent, Texas would have almost \$80 million per year for research, habitat management and protection, land acquisition, education, law enforcement, and outdoor recreation focused on Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) listed in the Texas Conservation Action Plan. A preliminary report by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department explains what the bill would mean for Texas, outlines Texas goals and objectives, and highlights examples showing how funds could be spent in Texas.

"For Texas, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act would mean transformative change for people and wildlife, the kind of breakthrough that comes once in a generation," said Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department executive director.

"Passage of this bill would galvanize state efforts to conserve and restore more than 1,300 nongame fish and wildlife species of concern here in the Lone Star State. By focusing on these species and their habitats, we could keep common species common and avoid the need for endangered species listings by getting ahead of wildlife declines while there's still time to act. That's good for jobs and the economy as well as wildlife, which is why this plan started with buy-in from industry and business. These species and the habitats where they live are the goose that lays the golden egg' which sustain multi-billion-dollar nature tourism industries in our state, as well as clean air and water and healthy outdoor recreation.

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Recovering America's Wildlife Act Would Bring \$63 Million Per Year to Texas, continued

H.R. 4647 would mean millions in new grants to nonprofits, universities, landowners, local communities and others. Besides natural resource benefits, this could also transform nature-based recreation and education opportunities for people of all ages, including children and families. It would be the greatest wildlife conservation breakthrough in decades."

It currently costs the American public hundreds of millions of dollars each year to restore threatened and endangered species, costs that could be avoided or greatly reduced if proactive conservation measures were implemented first. Proactive conservation is good for wildlife, good for taxpayers, good for business and good for our communities. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would provide the needed resources for proactive conservation nationwide.

The bill is being called the most important American wildlife conservation proposal since passage of two landmark federal laws Pittman-Robertson in 1937 and Dingell-Johnson in 1950, which provided breakthrough funding for game fish and animals on the brink of extinction.

"America's hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and boaters have been the primary funders of state-based conservation efforts to this day," said Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation President Jeff Crane. "This recommendation simply directs funding for conservation from other sectors that use our natural resources."

"We thank Representatives Fortenberry and Dingell for introducing the historic Recovering America's Wildlife Act," said Collin O'Mara, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation. "This bill will help thousands of wildlife species through proactive, collaborative, on-the-ground efforts. The approach is unique because it calls for early action to save struggling wildlife, rather than waiting until species are on the brink of extinction and need expensive 'emergency room' measures to recover. When this bill becomes law, we will increase wildlife populations, strengthen America's economy, and reduce the need for regulatory measures."

"A lot is at stake if we do not act soon. Every American benefits when we have healthy and accessible fish and wildlife. We need to start down a new path where we invest proactively in conservation rather than reactively."

More information about the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is on the alliance national website at OurNatureUSA.com or on the Texas chapter website at txwildlifealliance.org.

About the Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife

The Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife formed in 2017 to secure funding for much needed conservation of our most precious natural resources, our fish and wildlife. The Alliance was built upon the strong partnership created by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources. The Texas chapter includes more than 200 member organizations representing more than a million Texans. The diverse Texas coalition consists of landowners, conservation organizations, privately-held businesses, sportsmen's groups, church congregations, educational institutions, and other civic organizations, who have come together to support fish and wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation, and conservation education.

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Species Spotlight: Plains Spotted Skunk

WRITTEN BY TREY BARRON

Most people are all too familiar with the striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) and the associated odor that comes along with them, but there are six species of skunk in Texas, two of which occur in our part of the state. The plains spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius interrupta*), also called the civet cat or polecat, is the smallest of all Texas skunks. Despite their small size, they are formidable predators and smell just as terrible as their larger relatives. Males normally weigh less than two pounds and females around one pound. They are relatively slender, more weasel like, and have a small white spot on the forehead and in front of each ear. Instead of the two stripes running down the back as found on the striped skunk, they have multiple stripes and spots on the body all the way to the base of the tail. The tail is mostly black with a tuft of white hairs at the tip.



Spotted skunk. Photo@Robert Heischman

The plains spotted skunk prefers tall-grass prairies and woody habitats, and rocky outcrops and canyons where available. In areas they are locally common, they live in and around well-established farmyards and den under buildings and in pole barns, which is why many call them polecats. While they are more active than other skunks, they are not typically seen, because of their near entirely nocturnal habits. Plains spotted skunks can be found in trees and up in attics. Their diet consists largely of insects, but they also consume small mammals, fruits, birds and their eggs.

Breeding occurs in spring and some females may mate a second time in late summer. Gestation is around 50-65 days and litter size ranges from two to nine young with the average litter being four or five. Adult size is reached in about three months and by 10 months, both sexes reach sexual maturity. Predators include dogs, foxes, coyotes, cats, bobcats, and owls. When threatened, they will do several handstands to make them appear larger, and when necessary, can discharge musk at a distance of 4-5 meters.

At one point spotted skunks were much more abundant in Texas, and were heavily trapped until around 1940. At that point, it is believed that a change in agricultural practices, removal of hedge rows, increased pesticide use impacting their food source, and increased predators were contributors to the species decline. The plains spotted skunk is still present in our part of the state, just not in abundance as it once was. They are a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Texas and we are currently looking for sightings in order to gain more valuable data on the status of this species in Texas. If you see a spotted skunk, your local biologist would appreciate a report.

Schmidly, David J. 2004. The Mammals of Texas. Sixth Edition. University of Texas Press.



Trey Barron began his career with TPWD in 2011 as a wildlife biologist in the Texas panhandle. In May of 2014, he moved the coast to serve as wildlife biologist for Victoria, Refugio, and Calhoun counties. Trey is now the Wildlife Diversity Biologist for Region 4 and is focused on species of greatest conservation need. He received his Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology and Master of Science in Biology from West Texas A&M University.

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Species Spotlight: Plains Spotted Skunk, continued

Wanted:

Spotted skunks for parasite study



Why: We are actively collecting information on parasites of eastern spotted skunks (civet cats) throughout their range. We are seeking carcasses of any trapped or road-killed animals to examine for parasite infections.

What to do: Please record the date and location where animal was collected and get carcass on ice or refrigerate. Call for further instructions.

Contact: Robert Dowler at skunk.project@angelo.edu or (325) 486-6639. For immediate response, contact Hannah Jones at (325) 226-9222. If we are unavailable to answer your call immediately, please leave a detailed voice (or text) message so we can respond ASAP.



Department of Biology, Angelo State University, San Angelo, TX 76909

iNaturalist

WRITTEN BY TANIA HOMAYOUN

There's an app for that – exploring Texas nature with iNaturalist

Have you ever taken a walk through the woods or a hike through a field and wondered what that plant or insect was? Are you interested in sharing your nature knowledge with others or learning more about the plants and animals around you? Would you like to put your nature observations to work helping wildlife conservation in Texas? There's an app for that: iNaturalist!



Photo@Tania Homayoun, TPWD

What is iNaturalist?

iNaturalist is a community-driven online database of nature observations that helps users identify the plants and animals around them by sharing their sightings with a community of scientists and naturalists. Observations that meet certain criteria may be considered *research grade*, or of sufficient quality to be used in research and conservation work.

While iNaturalist started in 2008 as a master's project, it has grown into a world-wide project jointly supported by the California Academy of Sciences and National Geographic Society. With over 11 million observations and counting, it offers something for everyone, from land managers tracking restoration projects to teachers using it with their students, and from academic researchers to conservation professionals.

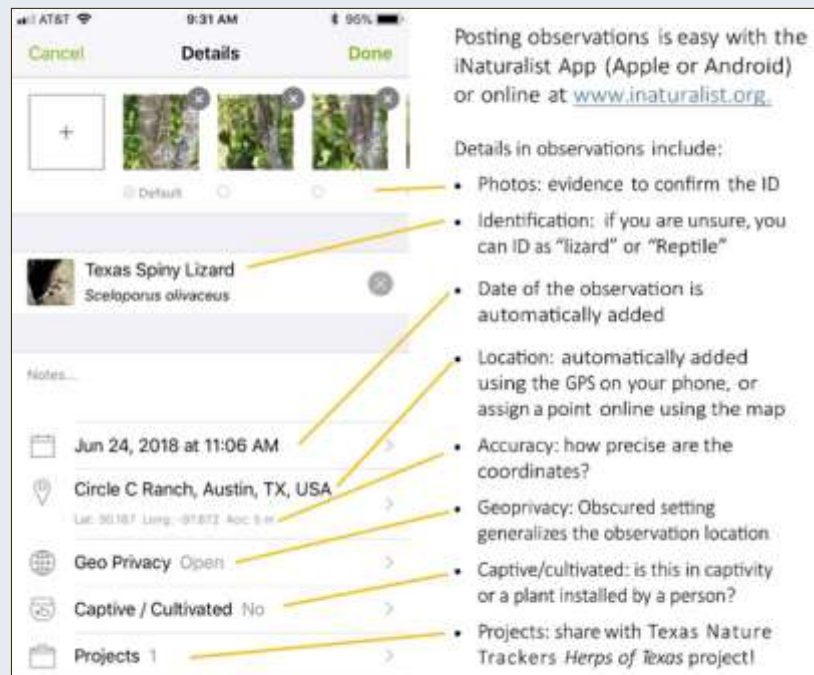
How iNaturalist works

The iNaturalist system is very simple and easy to learn. Users sign up for a free account and can upload observations either through the free phone app (for iPhone or Android) or through the website at www.inaturalist.org. At the heart of an observation is evidence of what you saw or heard: photos or sound recordings. When your observation is uploaded to the iNaturalist platform, other members of the community use the details of your observation (the photos/sound files, where it was seen, when it was seen, etc.) to help identify what you saw.

Contributing observations for conservation

Moving past the old paper data forms of the past, Texas Nature Trackers program at Texas Parks and Wildlife uses iNaturalist to manage its projects. When you share your observations with Texas Nature Trackers' iNaturalist projects, you are contributing important information about the presence and distribution of our plants and wildlife, helping us all better steward these resources. You can find links to these projects at www.tpwd.texas.gov/tracker under the **Projects** tab. When you join a project, you will then be able to easily add your observations to it via the website or phone app.

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iNaturalist, continued

Tips for making the most of iNaturalist

Take multiple photos for your observation. Close-ups, details of different features, and shots of the whole organism will help with identification. For plants, be sure to get photos showing close-ups of leaves, fruits/nuts/seeds, bark, branching pattern, as well as the whole plant.

- Try to include at least a basic identification to your observation. Even if you can't get more specific than "Plant", that label helps plant experts in the community find your observation.
- Fill in or check the accuracy (in feet or meters) for your observation. The more accurate the observation, the more useful it is.
- If you are concerned with the privacy of your observation, use the geoprivacy settings. Observations set as *Open* can be seen by everyone while observations set to *Obscured* hide the exact location. If you use the *Private* setting, the community can't tell anything at all about where your observation was made, making it very difficult to find your observation and help with identifications; we suggest adding a general location to the Description/Notes field, such as "X County, TX" to help place your observation in geographic context and make it more searchable.
- If you know the identification of certain plants or animals well, please contribute to the community and help add identifications for others.
- Have fun and enjoy exploring the nature around you!



Dr. Tania Homayoun joined Texas Parks and Wildlife in 2017 as a Texas Nature Tracker Biologist, engaging naturalists of all interests and ability levels in collecting citizen science and crowd-sourced data on Texas' unique plants and animals with a focus on species of greatest conservation need. Previously, she worked for Audubon Texas at the Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center and as the Conservation Science Team's Urban Conservation Program Manager. Tania holds bachelor's degrees in Biology and Anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin and a PhD in Conservation Biology from the University of Minnesota. She is an avid birder and always has room for one more native plant in her patio garden.

The Young Archer

WRITTEN BY BRENT PIERCE

October's Archery Season will be here before you know it. The long sizzling summer days will be fading away and fall will hopefully bring some cooler weather. As you start brushing up on your bow hunting skills, consider introducing a youngster to the sport. This summer will be a wonderful time to start preparing and practicing with your little hunting buddy for bow season. As bow hunters know, this is a sport that requires a lot of patience, so involving the young archer on as many practice rounds as possible will be beneficial to a rewarding future hunt. This will take a lot of dedication from you and the young archer, but well worth the time and effort. There are many reasons to get youth involved in bow hunting. It teaches respect and self-discipline, appreciation of nature, and it gets kids active, off the couch and out of the house.



Photo@TPWD

Like any sport, the most important aspect of bow hunting is getting the young archer comfortable with the bow. This involves many safety measures incorporated in your routine practice rounds. Proper drawing techniques and target practices are good places to start. There are local youth hunting organizations that can help introduce young people to archery and shooting. For instance, kids can join their local 4-H program at age 8, where they can become involved with shooting sports. Learning the proper techniques of archery can create a healthy respect of their weapon and their peers; which in turn creates self-disciplined, ethical and safe hunters.

The first few outings with a young bow hunter should be focused on exploring and observing nature and everything it encompasses. By simply pointing out the basic habitat needs of wildlife you can instill a spirit of conservation. For example, teach them how to track and discern animal signs, identify certain food and water sources, and areas utilized for shelter and corridors. Being able to interact face to face with wildlife in its natural setting will create an enthusiasm and appreciation for the great outdoors.

Once equipped with the proper skills, it is time to hit the trail. Before embarking on that big game hunt, you may want to consider bow fishing or hunting for smaller game. At first, this would allow for more opportunities to be successful with a lot more activity to keep them engaged. To a young hunter harvesting an animal will most likely be the highlight of the trip, but knowing how to clean and prepare their catch fosters strong ethics by learning how to eat what you kill and knowing that food doesn't always come from the supermarket.

Introducing bow hunting to our youth is an excellent way to foster many important lessons through real life experiences, while making lasting memories. The next time you plan a hunting trip, think of a child you would like to pass your knowledge to, so that the heritage of hunting may continue for future generations.



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

Plant Profile: Texas Coralbean (*Erythrina herbacea*)

WRITTEN BY DOUG JOBES

Texas coralbean is a native Texas shrub species that produces brilliant spring flowers each year. Following the blooms are bright red seeds that provide visual interest long into the summer months.

The tubular red flowers of the coralbean are attractive for migrating and resident hummingbirds and other pollinating insects. Its attractiveness and drought tolerance has also spurred popularity in landscaping, and this plant is naturally distributed throughout the Oak Prairie District. It is well adapted to sandy soils and partial shade. The leaves of the coralbean are compound which means they occur in multiples and are joined to a single stem. Members of this family of plants (*Fabaceae*) typify a trifoliolate compound leaf, meaning that each leaf is made up of three leaflets.

Some species of plants, including coralbean, have the ability to track the sun. This is called phototropism and it is defined as the orientation of a plant in response to light (see photos 1 and 2). At night, leaflets are oriented with tips pointing downwards. Leaflets rise in the morning and by noon reach a maximum elevation of about 60 degrees above the horizontal plane. Leaflets then rotate around the midrib by an average of 40-50 degrees. This adaptation allows the plant to maximize light interception in the morning and early afternoon (Herbert 1984).

The leaves and tender branches of coralbean are readily eaten by white-tailed deer. In fact, most of the shrubs that you find in the wild will have some sort of indication of herbivory; however, with good growing conditions the shrubs can still reach a few feet in height each year. Another factor that sometimes limits growth is cold temperatures. When temperatures fall just below freezing, the above ground portion of the plant will die back. So, in years that are preceded by a killing freeze, most wild plants will have dead stems.



Coralbean. Photo©Carolyn Fannon, Washington County, Texas.



Coralbean. Photo©Ray Matthews, Austin County, Texas.

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Plant Profile: Texas Coralbean (Erythrina herbacea), continued

Hummingbirds that migrate through our region, and even those that nest here, use the coralbean flowers for nectar, and it is considered by enthusiasts as one of the favorites for daily visitation. Not only does the hummingbird receive food from coralbean, but it also serves as the primary pollinator for this species. Pollination occurs as they travel back and forth to different flowers feeding on the sucrose rich nectar.

The pods that are produced after pollination contain several highly toxic red seeds, and these seeds protrude from the pod once it begins to dry. Little is known about the seed dispersal of this plant, but most plant species that produce such vibrant colored red seeds are dispersed by birds.

It's believed that the glossy, hard red seeds, mimic that of fleshy-pulped fruits, taking advantage of fruit eating birds to disperse their seeds with no compensatory reward. If you are lucky enough to stumble upon a coralbean or you are already aware of its presence, hopefully this article can help you better appreciate another Texas native species that has great value to wildlife and nature lovers alike.



Top: Coralbean, Bottom: Coralbean seed pods. Photos©Doug Jobes.

T. J. Herbert. "Axial Rotation of *Erythrina herbacea* Leaflets." American Journal of Botany 71.1 (1984): 76-79.



Doug Jobes is the Wildlife Biologist for Dewitt and Goliad counties. After a three-year enlistment with the US Army as an Airborne Ranger with the 75th Ranger Regiment he graduated from the Daniel B. Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia. He then received his Masters of Science in Wildlife Ecology and Management from Oklahoma State University. His professional interests include working with small acreage landowners and wildlife management associations.

Nature Tourism - A New Revenue Stream for Private Landowners

WRITTEN BY WILFRED AND CLAIRE KORTH - OWNERS/OPERATORS OF BARNHART Q5 NATURE RETREAT, BERCLAIR, TX

Over the next 25 years it is projected that Texas will add 16 million more citizens, bringing the Texas population to 40 million.

With the growing challenge for public agencies to add more parklands, private landowners will have the opportunity to fill the gap in offering outdoor recreation opportunities for Texans through nature-based tourism opportunities. While we are aware not all landowners or their lands are suited for these ventures, we find our guest housing and nature-based programs are rewarding and fun, helping to supplement income and expenses at our ranch.



Photo©Wilfred Korth

What is Nature Tourism, Ecotourism, Agritourism, and why should I be interested? These are all terms given to describe tourism based on an area's natural attractions such as wildlife, hunting, fishing, and ecosystems-basically any activity which provides an opportunity for people to reconnect with nature. With the majority of Texans now living in urban areas there is a growing loss of connection to nature and our rural lands. Nature-based tourism promotes goals of conserving habitat, works to develop sustainable economic development, develops support for wildlife conservation programs, educates the public on the value of undeveloped and agriculture lands, and provides recreational opportunities for the public on private lands. This tourism opportunity matches up very well with urban dwellers who are looking to reconnect with nature, enjoy wildlife and bird viewing, seek the rural Texas experience, and want a chance to escape the city.

Who is a nature tourist? The typical nature tourist is an average age of 60 years of age, college educated, active, travels with spouse and friends, and has an average income greater than \$60,000. Specific activities they want to participate in are fishing. The largest group of nature tourists are those who want to watch or photograph wildlife in their native habitat. This group of over 4.4 million participants (68% of the current Texas population) spend over \$2.9 billion annually on this activity. Growing areas of nature tourism include outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, outdoor photography, visiting historic sites, and sightseeing.

Nature tourism addresses several current tourism trends. Seventy-six percent of travelers would like to visit someplace they have never visited before. Forty-eight percent are interested in a destination that is remote and untouched. Fifty-seven percent are attracted to an area's culture, and forty four percent would like to learn a new skill or engage in a new activity during their trip, which fits right in to working farms and ranches. Tourists would pay to pick your grapes or help work your cattle, for example, which is reflected in the growing popularity of pick-your-own farms. Nature Tourism is experiential focused on all the senses of a tourist. They want to experience rural landscapes and go home with memories of interesting stories, places, and people.

What is required to develop a nature tourism business? First, ask yourself these important questions:

- **Am I a people person?** If not, do you have someone who would be the face of your ranch or farm who is? Depending on the operation you design for your ranch or farm, your lifestyle could be impacted greatly, especially if you are not interested in meeting others and "selling" your product.

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Nature Tourism - A New Revenue Stream for Private Landowners, continued

- **What does my land have to offer?** We recommend you do an inventory of your land's existing assets. Prepare a list of such things as rivers or creeks, wetlands, ponds, hills, oak mottes, barns, areas of interest, even cemeteries. If you raise goats or other livestock, do they provide you milk, meat, or are they accessible? If you farm your property, are you willing to allow guests in to help harvest the produce? We find the real beauty of nature tourism is that as a business its limits can be set by us and can change as our needs change.
- **Research, research, and more research.** There are tools and resources on the internet to give you ideas in developing your unique experience. Research existing operations. Two existing operations in the Victoria region are the Barnhart Q5 Ranch and Nature Retreat (www.barnharttranchretreat.com), and the Fennessey Ranch (fennesseyranch.com). Some unique new ideas to consider are "Horse Hotels" (www.horsemotel.com) offering overnight facilities for horses in transit, Hipcamp (www.hipcamp.com) which offers unique camping experiences on private lands, Glamping (www.glamplng.com) which promotes high end camping experiences, and Airbnb (www.airbnb.com) which promotes lodging in private homes in all types of locations.
- **Determine your market.** Who is your target market and what experience do they want? Can you easily reach them? What is the size of the target market? And is that target market compatible with your needs and wants. Consider whether you want to attract high end tourists who will have high expectations but would be willing to pay more, or casual tourists who will be less demanding but pay less for the experience. A high end tourist can be a birder who will travel the world to add a specific bird to their life list and a casual birder is one who just wants to see birds of any kind.
- **Does your product complement existing activities in your region?** Partner with them! Developing partnerships with complementing businesses and activities pays off.
- **Marketing options.** There are many free marketing options available today, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. which can reach your determined market and are free. Your local Chamber of Commerce and Regional Tourism Councils can be very helpful in promoting your business, as can restaurants and local businesses, so consider designing promotional rack cards, and placing ads in specialty publications, having a booth at Nature Festivals, etc., always keeping in mind the audience you want to reach.
- **Utilize local existing tourist attractions to tap in to your market and enhance your guests' experience.** In our region we have the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (TPWD) Great Texas Wildlife Trails (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildlifetrails), Texas Paddling Trails (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/paddling_trails), Great Texas Coastal Birding Trails, and the THC Heritage Trails (Texas Independence Trail, and El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail).



Photo@Wilfred Korth



Photo@TPWD

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Nature Tourism - A New Revenue Stream for Private Landowners, continued

- Liability.** Before inviting the public on to your land you will want to educate yourself on liability issues. In 2015 the Texas Legislation passed Senate Bill 610, known as the Texas Agritourism Act. Essentially this statute provides that an “agritourism entity” is not liable to any person for injuries or damages to an “agritourism participant” injured on agricultural land if either the required signage is posted or a written agreement containing the required language is signed prior to the activity. The required language is “WARNING: UNDER TEXAS LAW (CHAPTER 75A, CIVIL PRACTICE AND REMEDIES CODE), AN AGRITOURISM ENTITY IS NOT LIABLE FOR ANY INJURY TO OR DEATH OF AN AGRITOURISM PARTICIPANT RESULTING FROM AN AGRITOURISM ACTIVITY.” Texas Civ. Practice & Remedies Code 75A.003.

Once you open your gates to visitors it is important to follow up with them to help you improve your future marketing and your operations. Collect zip codes. How did they find out about your business? What do they look for when planning trips? How satisfied were they with their experience at your business? What would have improved their overall experience? This information will help you determine everything from how well your product is being received to where to focus future marketing efforts.

Offering a nature-based tourism operation on your lands can be a rewarding experience, help fill a growing need, and help reconnect visitors to the importance of our rural lands and conservation efforts. We find it attracts people who are very like ourselves - they have a yearning for simpler things, love being in nature, and have a respect for our Texas lands and way of life.

As you decide if you want to establish one of these businesses reach out to your local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Wildlife Biologist and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Agent who can help you determine what resources you have to work with. Visit the TPWD Nature Tourism Site at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/naturetourism; Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Site at <http://naturetourism.tamu.edu>, and the Texas Nature Tourism Council site at <http://www.ttia.org/?page=tntc> for even more information on the subject.



Top: Photo©Chase Fountain, TPWD, Bottom: Photo©TPWD.



Left, Middle: Photos©Clint Faas, TPWD.



Right: Photo©Marvin Markman.

Snake Safety

WRITTEN BY LAURA SHERROD

It's that time of the year – bees are buzzing, birds are singing, and snakes are out!

As it warms up in spring, the prevalence of these slithering critters increases. Snakes are ectothermic, meaning they cannot regulate their own body temperature like mammals. Therefore, they enjoy basking in the sun and being more active as the spring and summertime temperatures increase. There are nearly 3,000 species of snakes around the world, and Texas is home to approximately 76 species.

As a biologist, I very commonly hear that “the only good snake is a dead snake.” Did you know that snakes are very efficient at keeping rodent numbers in check? A single snake can eat dozens of rats and mice a year! Without these guys, our world would be overrun with rodents. What about the venomous ones, surely they don't serve much of a purpose, right? Actually, snake venom is very important to people. It is being used around the world to help with health issues such as cancers, heart disease, Parkinson's, and many more. Some of these helpful venomous snakes are in our own backyard. The copperhead has proteins in its venom that are showing very promising results in cancer research. The proteins are able to block cancer cell migration in multiple cancer models. So, even these guys are useful (and they eat rodents, too!).

While not a proponent of killing every venomous snake that you see, I would certainly use caution. For one, be aware of your surroundings. Do not go running out of the house bare-footed into the leaves or tall grass. Step on or go way around logs or rocks in your path since snakes may lie next to these objects. Lastly, make sure you can always see all parts of your body. For example, do not reach under something if you can't see where your hand is going. If you do find a snake, know that most snakes we have around this part of Texas are not venomous. If you can remember what the five common venomous species we have in our part of the state look like – coral snake, copperhead, cottonmouth/water moccasin, western diamondback, and timber rattlesnake – for the most part the rest are not venomous. There are 2 exceptions, the pygmy rattlesnake and massasauga rattlesnake can occur in much lesser frequencies. If you encounter a venomous species, don't try to provoke it! Back away and be respectful. I like to compare venomous snakes to broken glass – as long as you aren't picking it up or stepping on it, it's not going to hurt you.



Top: Coral snake,
Middle 1: Western Diamondback rattlesnake,
Middle 2: Massasauga rattlesnake,
Bottom: Cottonmouth (Water Moccasin).
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Continued on page 16

Snake Safety, continued

However, on the chance you are bitten by a venomous snake:

- Try to take note of the color and shape of the snake – do not try to trap it or pick it up (this may put you or someone else at risk for another bite).
- Do NOT apply a tourniquet, slash the wound with a knife, apply ice or water, or suck out the venom. In other words, do NOT do what you see in the movies!
- Do NOT drink alcohol as a pain killer.
- DO keep the bitten person still and calm to slow the spread of venom.
- DO seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Annually there are approximately 7,000 snake bites in the United States. 0.2% (1 out of 500) venomous snakebites result in death. On average, 1-2 people die annually in Texas from venomous snakebites. You are actually more likely to die from lightning than a venomous snakebite! It is also important to remember that roughly half of all snakebites are “dry,” or the snake does not actually inject venom.

Snakes seem to be one of the most misunderstood and “scary” creatures around these parts. Just remember, as long as you are aware of your surroundings and are cautious when coming into contact with snakes, you shouldn’t be scared of them. They are a part of our world and serve their purpose in our ecosystem. Just make sure to watch where you step!



*Top: Pygmy rattlesnake,
Middle: Timber rattlesnake,
Bottom: Copperhead.
Photos©Trey Barron, TPWD.*

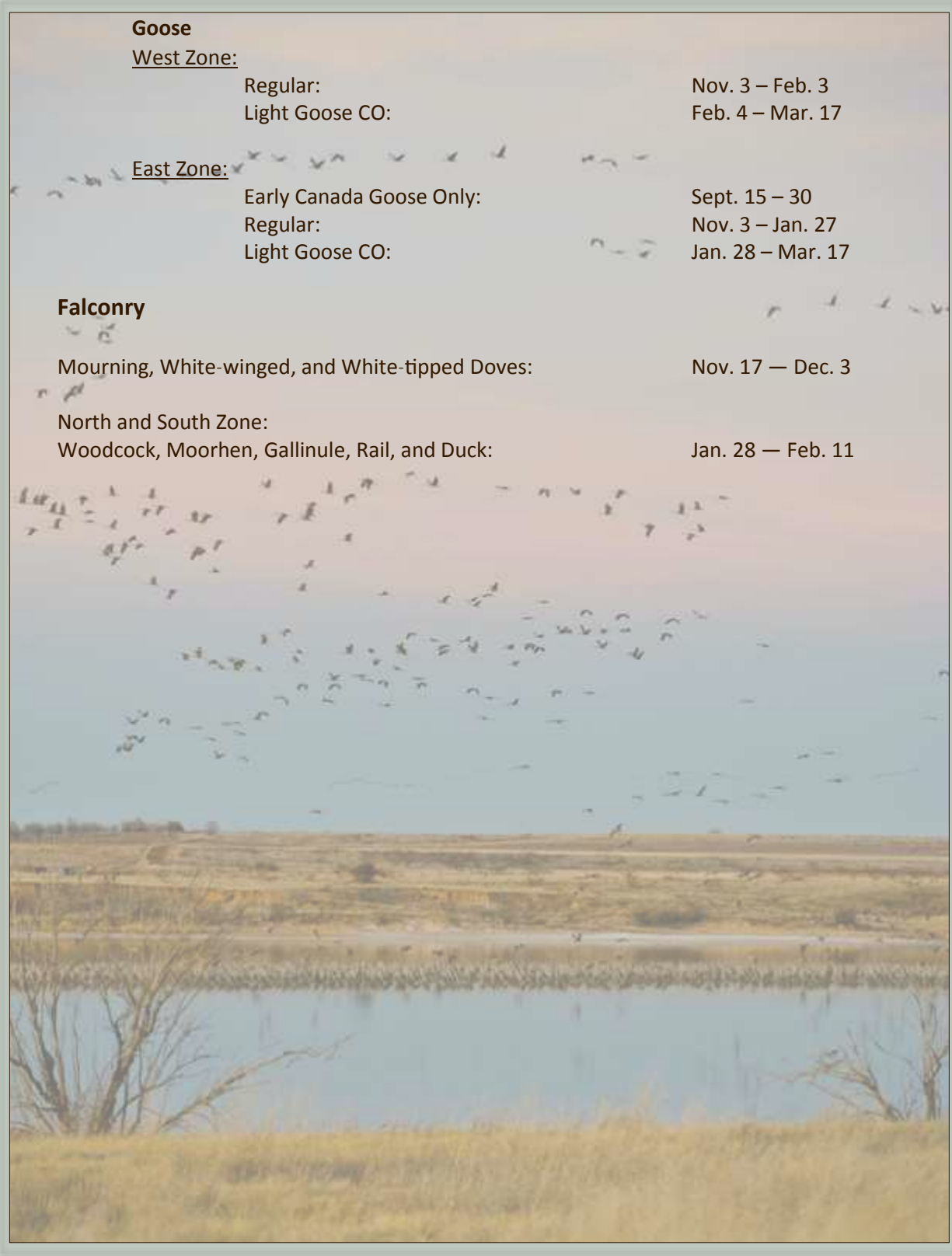


Laura Sherrod is the Wildlife Biologist for Lee and Fayette counties. She grew up in Dripping Springs and graduated from Texas State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Wildlife Biology. Laura was hired by Texas Parks & Wildlife in 2008, where she worked with the Big Game Program until accepting her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

Texas 2018-19 Migratory Game Bird Final Approved Hunting Seasons

Webless:	
Rail, Gallinule, Moorhen:	Sept. 15 — 30 Nov. 3 — Dec. 26
Snipe:	Oct. 27 — Feb. 10
Woodcock:	Dec. 18 — Jan. 31
Dove:	
<u>North & Central Zone:</u>	Sept. 1 — Nov. 4 Dec. 21 — Jan. 14
<u>South Zone:</u>	Sept. 14 — Oct. 30 Dec. 14 — Jan. 21
<u>Special White-wing Dove Days for the South Zone:</u>	Sept. 1, 2, & 8, 9
Sandhill Crane:	
<u>North Zone:</u>	Oct. 27 — Jan. 27
<u>Central Zone:</u>	Nov. 23 — Jan. 27
<u>South Zone:</u>	Dec. 15 — Jan. 20
Waterfowl:	
Duck:	
<u>Early Teal:</u>	Sept. 15 — 30
<u>High Plains Mallard Management Unit:</u>	
Youth:	Oct. 20 — 21
Regular:	Oct. 27 — 28 Nov. 2 — Jan. 27
<u>North Zone:</u>	Youth: Nov. 3 — 4 Regular: Nov. 10 — 25 Dec. 1 — Jan. 27
<u>South Zone:</u>	Youth: Oct. 27 — 28 Regular: Nov. 3 — 25 Dec. 8 — 27

Texas 2018-19 Migratory Game Bird Final Approved Hunting Seasons, continued



Goose

West Zone:

Regular:	Nov. 3 – Feb. 3
Light Goose CO:	Feb. 4 – Mar. 17

East Zone:

Early Canada Goose Only:	Sept. 15 – 30
Regular:	Nov. 3 – Jan. 27
Light Goose CO:	Jan. 28 – Mar. 17

Falconry

Mourning, White-winged, and White-tipped Doves:	Nov. 17 — Dec. 3
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North and South Zone:

Woodcock, Moorhen, Gallinule, Rail, and Duck:	Jan. 28 — Feb. 11
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Photo©TPWD

Upcoming Events

JULY

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>21 Salt Flat and Sandies Creek WMA Meeting
 Pilgrim Community Center at
 FM 1116 Pilgrim, TX
 Begins at 6:00 p.m.
 Contact Jay Tinsley at 830-857-5905 or
 tinsley@texasenterprises.com</p> | <p>30 Guadalupe River North WMA Meeting
 Patty Dodson Center Classroom, Victoria, TX
 Begins at 6:30 p.m.
 Contact Shannon Lawrence at
 shannon.lawrence@tpwd.texas.gov</p> |
|---|---|

AUGUST

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>7 Lost Prong WMA Fall Meeting
 Mikeska's BBQ
 22730 US-59, El Campo, TX
 Begins at 6:00 p.m.
 Contact Megan Stovall at 979-541-4369</p> | <p>17 Washington County Wildlife Society Annual Fundraiser and Dinner
 Washington County Fairgrounds Events Center
 1305 East Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, TX 77833
 Social begins at 5:30 p.m., Dinner at 6:15 p.m.
 Contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at
 979-277-6212 or visit www.wcwildlife.org</p> |
| <p>14 Thompson Bottom WMA Fall Meeting
 Palm Grove at Old South Plantation
 5227 Skinner Ln., Richmond, TX
 Begins at 6:00 p.m.
 Contact Clint Faas at 832-595-8999</p> | <p>24 Guadalupe County WMA Meeting
 The Big Red Barn, at the intersection of
 Hwy. 123 and Cordova Rd. in Seguin, TX 78155
 Begins at 6:00 p.m.
 Contact William Dwyer at 830-305-0886 or
 treshermanosranchman99@gmail.com</p> |

SEPTEMBER

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>8 Jackson County WMA Fall Meeting
 Jackson County Service Center located at
 411 N. Wells St. Edna, TX 77957
 Begins at 10:00 a.m.
 Contact Wade Watkins at 361-771-2401 or
 Jim Theiss at 713-253-1135
 https://www.facebook.com/jacksoncowildlife/</p> | <p>9 Buckners Creek WMA Fall Meeting
 St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church Hall
 126 Plum Church Rd., Plum, TX 78952
 Registration at 2:00 p.m., meeting at 3:00 p.m.
 Contact Paula Thompson at 979-549-5828 or
 paula_thompson52@yahoo.com</p> |
| <p>8 North East Colorado County WMA Meeting
 St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church (Frelsburg)
 Begins at 6:00 p.m.
 Contact Terrel Maertz at 979-732-1727
 www.ccwma.org</p> | <p>14 Colorado River and Central Colorado County WMA's Meeting
 Schneider Hall
 Begins at 6:30 p.m.
 Contact Scott Beauchamp at 979-255-1740 or
 Ryan Beane at 979-732-9533
 www.ccwma.org</p> |

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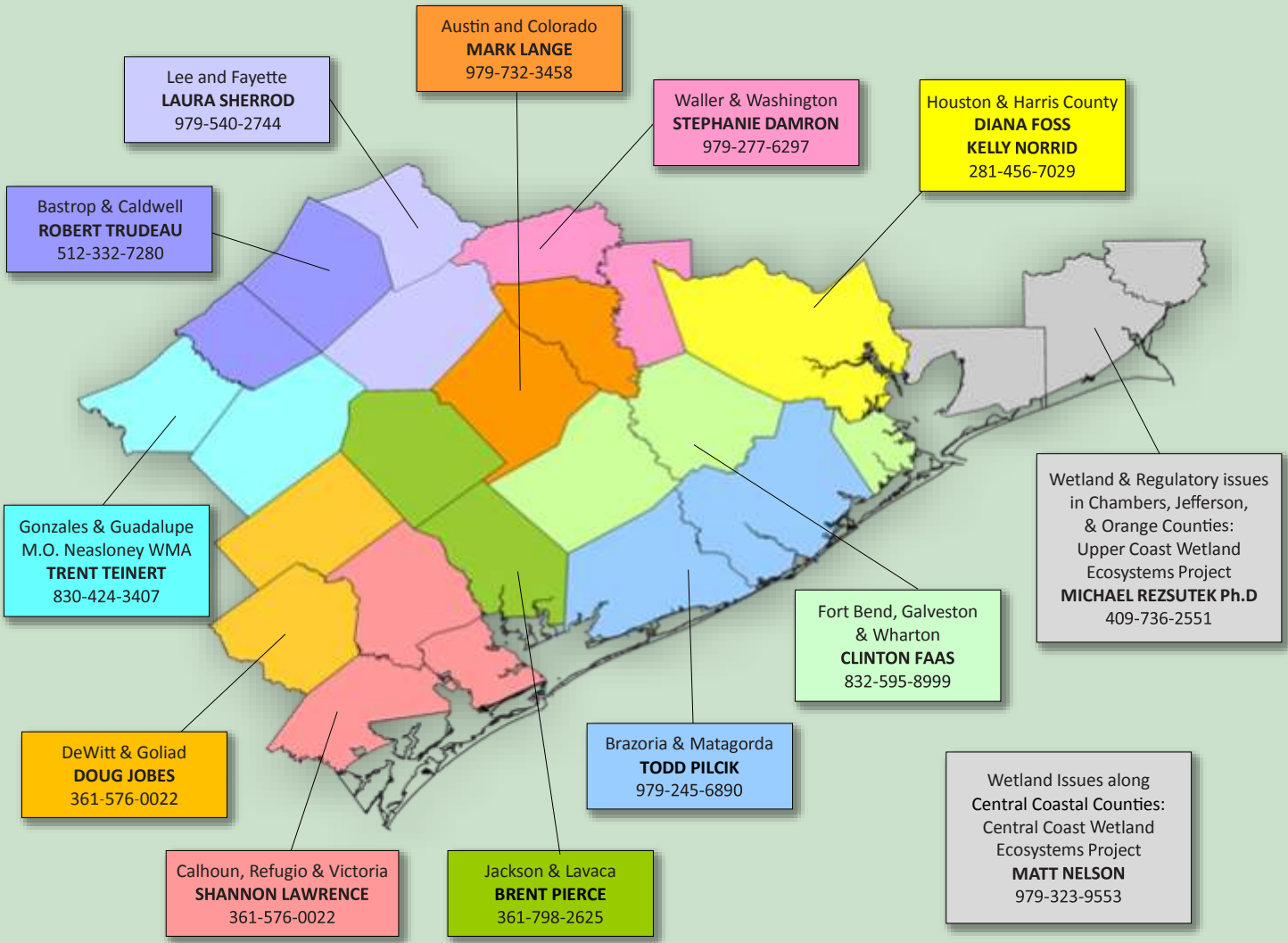
*Upcoming Events, continued***SEPTEMBER**

- 15 Sandy Creek (Colorado County) WMA Meeting**
Columbus (KC) Hall
Begins at 11:00 a.m.
Contact Ronnie Stock at 979-732-1004 or www.ccwma.org
- 15 Harvey Creek (Colorado County) WMA Meeting**
Columbus (KC) Hall
Begins at 6:00 p.m.
Contact Brian Emmel at 512-750-8777 or www.ccwma.org
- 16 Rabbs Creek WMA Fall Meeting**
Holy Cross Lutheran Church
5603 US-77, La Grange, TX 78945
(Warda Church Road)
Begins at 4:00 p.m.
Contact Ryan Hentschel at 210-632-3185 or hentschel@irby.com
- 16 Lavaca County WMA Fall Meeting**
Knights of Columbus Hall
321 US Hwy. 77 S., Hallettsville, TX 77964
Begins at 10:00 a.m.
Contact Joel Wagner at 361-798-6506 or lavacacountywma@gmail.com
www.lcwma.org
- 22 Egypt WMA Fall Meeting**
Tim Krenek's Barn
Begins at 9:00 a.m.
Contact Tim Krenek at 979-533-1326
- 22 Oakridge WMA Meeting**
Oakridge Community Center/Fire Station
Begins at 9:00 a.m.
Contact Jack Jetton at 281-910-1432 or www.ccwma.org
- 23 West Yegua/Two Creeks WMA Fall Meeting**
Flying Z Ranch
2378 FM 1624, Lincoln, TX 78948
Begins at 5:00 p.m.
Contact Greg Sherrod at 512-431-3558 or gsherrod@gmail.com
- 28 South Lee County WMA Meeting**
Serbin Picnic Grounds
1572 County Rd. 211, Giddings, TX 78942
Begins at 6:00 p.m.
Contact Dusty Boullion at 979-716-0540

OCTOBER

- 13 North Central Fayette County WMA Fall Meeting**
Camp Kubena (Cooper Farm)
2001 Waldeck Rd., Ledbetter, TX 78946
Begins at 4:00 p.m.
Contact Norman Schultz at 979-249-7159
www.ncfcwildlife.com
- 13 East Navidad WMA Meeting**
Dubina Hall
Social begins at 5:30 p.m.
Contact Mark Brown at 281-250-1036 or mark@superiorbuildings.com

Our Wildlife Biologists



District 7 Leader DAVID FORRESTER 979-968-3501	Technical Guidance Biologist BOBBY EICHLER 979-968-9942	Wildlife Diversity Biologist TREY BARRON 361-576-0022
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 PWD LF W7000-2068 (07/18)

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