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**June 24, 2015**

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## **TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE RECEIVES STRONG SUPPORT FROM TEXAS LEGISLATURE**

*Lawmakers helped ensure dedicated funding to secure state and local parks' future*

**AUSTIN**—The Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation applauded the work of the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature in providing substantive funding for the maintenance and preservation of our state parks both now and into the future. In particular the passage of HB 158, which Governor Abbott signed into law on June 8, will unambiguously dedicate 94% of the Sporting Goods Sales Tax to be used only for state and local parks moving forward.

“House and Senate leaders came together in an unprecedented way to do what’s right for our parks and for the people of Texas,” said Dan Allen Hughes, Chairman of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission. “Because of dedicated public servants like Speaker Joe Straus, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Rep. Lyle Larson, among many others, Texans for generations to come will get to enjoy the endless natural beauty and outdoor recreation that our parks provide. Importantly, by creating transparency and consistency in the parks budget, the Department will hopefully be able to operate on sound, fiscal footing, better prepared to meet the demands of our growing population.”

“Our state parks have a profound impact on every person who lives in or visits our great state, and they are the most visible example of how the state takes care of its most iconic institutions,” said Rep. Lyle Larson, the bill’s author. “We’re proud to report that HB 158 was finally passed in both the House and Senate and signed by the Governor.”

The Sporting Goods Sales Tax revenue for the 2016-2017 biennium will generate approximately \$261.1 million for state and local parks. In addition to passing HB 158, however, the Legislature saw fit to make an increase in the operating funds for parks, and a substantial increase in the capital construction budget. Funds allocated for capital construction will allow the parks to begin to modernize a deteriorating, aging park system, addressing some of the backlog of repairs that have been put on hold awaiting proper funds. It will also enable the department to begin addressing emergency repair needs resulting from recent floods.

“The passage of HB 158 is a monumental achievement that would not have been possible without a convergence of conservation champions both inside and outside of the capitol,” said George Bristol, Chair of the Texas State Parks Advisory Committee. “The security the dedication of the Sporting Goods Sales Tax provides, will help ensure Texas families can continue to enjoy the state and local parks that benefit from the tax.”

In addition to funding, the Legislature addressed a number of non-revenue related items that had been raised by the Department. SB 381 re-establishes opportunity for volunteers to operate state vehicles and other equipment. This is an important change that will provide the Department more flexibility in leveraging the tremendous outpouring of volunteer support our state parks receive. With these appropriations, specifically the capital construction money, the Department will be able to better prepare for the future, modernize our park system and continue to serve as tremendous stewards of our state's great natural resources.

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