



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 7, 2019

MEDIA CONTACT: Jenifer Sarver
512-577-9099
Jenifer@SarverStrategies.com

STATE PARKS A BOON TO TEXAS ECONOMY ACCORDING TO NEW REPORT

Parks generated nearly \$900 million in sales in 2018

AUSTIN — The Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation today released a [new report](#) about the strong and growing economic role state parks have on the Texas economy. **The research showed the parks generated more than \$891 million in sales activity, had a \$240 million impact on the incomes of Texas residents, and supported an estimated 6,081 jobs throughout the state in 2018.** The real power in this report is the impact that state parks have on their local economies. Places like Galveston, Bastrop and Amarillo benefit economically from the thousands of visitors who flock to their communities to visit the state parks.

“State and local parks are important to our state’s economy and help preserve our Texas way of life,” said Speaker Dennis Bonnen. “With more than 10 million visitors annually, it’s clear that Texans support and enjoy our parks, and we should do all we can to make sure future generations can continue to do so.”

The report, directed by Dr. John L. Crompton of Texas A&M University, updates a [similar report](#) published in 2014. It provides a breakdown of the economic impact of 88 state parks and their respective host counties. This report demonstrates a healthy increase over the 2014 report, which estimated the parks generated \$774 million in sales activity, had a \$202 million impact on the incomes of Texas residents and supported 4,871 jobs. It should be noted that these numbers would likely have been higher were it not for significant natural disasters, such as Hurricane Harvey, which caused considerable damage and closure to a number of parks.

“These numbers illustrate the significant and positive impacts our state parks have for communities across the State,” said Ralph H. Duggins, Chairman of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. “Because Texas is 95-6% privately owned, with 80% of our citizens living in urban areas, access to the outdoors and wildlife typically comes only through state parks. It is great news for Texas that the leadership in the Legislature recognizes this and is working on a bipartisan basis to pass a resolution that would give the voters a chance to approve the dedication of sporting goods sales taxes to our parks and historic sites.”

A decade of public opinion surveys show that Texans overwhelmingly support the parks and conservation of Texas’ natural areas. The latest [survey](#) showed 84 percent of all voters agreed with the statement: *“Unless we protect Texas’ natural areas, we will lose the very things that make Texas a special place in which to live.”*

State Park visitation is nearing 10 million visitors annually, with park revenues experiencing a nearly 40 percent increase in the last five years. But our park system is aging and infrastructure is outdated. Nearly 80 percent of state parks were developed more than 30 years ago, with dozens of those established 70 or more years ago. Chronic underfunding has placed a strain on our system. If we are to meet growing demand and ensure future generations can enjoy the outdoors, our parks need a dedicated stream of funding.

-More-

“This report on the economic contributions to our citizens, our communities and our state demonstrates the direct tie-in between attractive venues, visitorship and sustainable and adequate funding for our state and local parks,” said George Bristol, Former Chairman of the State Parks Advisory Committee. “It has become apparent to many that this can only be achieved and maintained by a constitutional amendment voted on by the citizens of Texas.”

In 1993, the Texas Legislature wisely moved to create a consistent funding stream for the parks, designating a portion of the sales taxes collected from the sale of sporting goods, known as the Sporting Goods Sales Tax (SGST). Unfortunately, the funds have not consistently found their way to the parks. In fact, from 1993 to 2017, the State has collected nearly \$2.5 billion in revenues from the SGST, yet only 40 percent has been appropriated for parks. Funds were diverted for other purposes unrelated to the parks and to balance the state budget. In both the 84th and 85th Legislative Sessions, with the active support of a diverse coalition of Texans from hunting and fishing groups, to environmentalists and conservation organizations, there have been legislative fixes to address this issue. Yet the fixes ended up being temporary and the relief has been short-lived. It is time for a sustainable solution.

With the 86th Texas Legislature underway, two bills have been addressed to find that solution. State Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) is the lead sponsor of SB 526, which would constitutionally dedicate revenue from the SGST to fund the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. State Representative John Cyrier (R-Lockhart) has introduced the companion piece in the House, HB 1214. The Texas Constitution provides that the legislature, by a two-thirds vote of all members of each house, may propose amendments revising the constitution and that proposed amendments must then be submitted for approval to the qualified voters of the state.

In 2014, the Texas State Park Advisory Committee [recommended](#) a constitutional amendment permanently guaranteeing that revenues generated from the SGST be dedicated to supporting state and local parks. According to all polls taken over the last decade, 70 percent of Texas voters would support a constitutional amendment to permanently dedicate the SGST revenues to the state and local parks and historic sites.

A new group, the Texas Coalition for State Parks, was launched by a group of former Texas Parks & Wildlife Commissioners and park advocates with the sole purpose of advocating for a constitutional dedication of the Sporting Goods Sales Tax to state parks funding. The group includes the following members:

Access Fund | ANCA Texas | Apache Corporation | Audubon Texas | Austin Ridge Riders Mountain Biking Club | Backcountry Hunters & Anglers | Bayou Land Conservancy | Bayou Preservation Association | Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust | BikeTexas | Braun & Gresham, PLLC | Caddo Lake Institute | Cibolo Nature Center and Farm | Coastal Bend Bays and Estuary Program | Coastal Conservation Association | Comal County Conservation Alliance | Colorado River Land Trust | The Conservation Fund | Dallas Urban Forest | Ducks Unlimited | East Texas Woods & Waters Foundation | Environment Texas | Fin & Fur Films | Fort Worth Audubon Society | Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge | Friends of the Brazos River | Friends of White Rock Lake | Frontera Land Alliance | Galveston Bay Foundation | Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance | Green Spaces Alliance | Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust | Hill Country Alliance | Hill Country Conservancy | Hill Country Land Trust | Katy Prairie Conservancy | Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club | National Parks Conservation Association | National Wildlife Federation | Native Plant Society of Texas | The Nature Conservancy | Northeast Texas Trails Coalition | Plateau Land & Wildlife Management, Inc. | Primitive Texas and Louisiana | Rails-to-Trails Conservancy | Safari Club International - Austin Chapter | Safari Club International - Houston Chapter | Spectrum Trail Racing | Stewards of the Wild | Texans for State Parks | Texas Agricultural Land Trust | Texas Center for Policy Studies | Texas Conservation Alliance | Texas Foundation for Conservation | Texas Historic Tree Coalition | Texas Land Trust Council | Texas Outdoor Partners | Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation | Texas Recreation and Park Society (TRAPS) | Texas Municipal League | Texas Rivers Protection Association | Texas Travel Industry Association | Texas Wildlife Association | The Wildlife Society - Texas Chapter | Travis Audubon Society | Trinity Nature Conservancy | Wimberley Valley Watershed Association