

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 2, 2026



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TPWF Secures 650 Acres for Future State Park on Lake Palestine

Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) is investing more than \$10 million to secure 650 acres on Lake Palestine in Henderson County for a future Texas state park. The property, one of the largest contiguous landholdings with frontage on the lake, was acquired by TPWF on Oct. 1, 2026. TPWF will make additional investments in the property before it is transferred to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) identified the property as a potential future state park site in 2025, and TPWF stepped in to lead the acquisition. TPWF will hold the property until TPWD can acquire it in late 2027, when additional funding from the Centennial Parks Conservation Fund becomes available. The acquisition protects one of the last large blocks of habitat in this part of East Texas and will ultimately expand public access to Lake Palestine.

"Opportunities to protect a property like this don't come along very often, and when they do, timing is critical," said Anne Brown, TPWF executive director. "TPWF was able to step in and secure this land now so it can ultimately become a place where generations of Texans can enjoy the outdoors. This is a great example of what public-private partnership can accomplish for conservation in Texas."

Located about 18 miles west of Tyler and 20 miles east of Athens, the property has been owned by the Pollard family since 1940 and was part of the family's longtime Texas Pecan Nursery operation. The land includes native East Texas pine forests, ponds, pecan orchards and frontage on Lake Palestine. It provides habitat for white-tailed deer, bobcats, waterfowl and a variety of woodland and water-dependent birds.

For Sam Pollard, president of Texas Pecan Nursery, the decision means land that has been part of his family for generations will remain largely undeveloped and eventually be opened for others to enjoy. Pollard grew up working, hunting and fishing on the property, and his children and grandchildren have their own memories of time spent there.

"This land is part of my soul," Pollard said. "It means a lot to me that we can leave a legacy for people to enjoy."

The property offers significant potential for both conservation and outdoor recreation. Lake Palestine reaches depths of 58 feet and is popular for boating, paddling, swimming and fishing for bass, catfish, crappie and sunfish. Future park visitors will also enjoy scenic blufftop lake views, wildlife and bird watching and the property's existing pecan orchard.

"We are excited to add this East Texas gem to the Texas State Park system," said Rodney Franklin, director of Texas State Parks. "Families will be able to enjoy lake recreation on Lake Palestine, along with the pecan trees that are a signature of the property. We are grateful to our partners, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation, and to owner Sam Pollard and his family who have graciously allowed this special slice of the Pineywoods to be accessible for generations of Texans."

TPWD plans to open the future park in phases, beginning with guided access, followed by day use and eventually full day and overnight access. After TPWD purchases the property from TPWF, the agency will invite public input to discuss options for the future park. Once developed, planned amenities include hike and bike trails, traditional and primitive campsites, day-use areas and lakefront access. Habitat restoration will also be an important part of preparing the property for its future as a state park.

Private philanthropy plays an important role in making the acquisition possible. The NextEra Energy Foundation, a corporate foundation of NextEra Energy Inc. and NextEra Energy Resources, provided \$100,000 in support of the project, and TPWF also tapped its Land Conservation Loan Fund, a donor-supported revolving fund established to help TPWF act quickly on time-sensitive land conservation opportunities. Lyda Hill Philanthropies was an inaugural funder of that impactful loan fund.

The Lake Palestine acquisition continues a long history of partnership between TPWF and TPWD to secure significant properties for conservation and public recreation. Recent projects have included Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, Powderhorn State Park and Wildlife Management Area, Trinity River Wildlife Management Area and an expansion of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area.

Since 1991, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has worked to advance Texas' proud outdoor traditions and conserve and enhance our state's lands, waters and wildlife. Our vision is for all Texans to have access to the wild things and wild places of our state, both now and for generations to come. For more information, please visit www.tpwf.org.

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