



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TEXAS HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON BILL TO CREATE HISTORIC TEXAS LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

AUSTIN, TEXAS — The Texas House Committee on Natural Resources heard testimony this week on two bills, HB 3165 and HJR 138, which would create the Texas Land and Water Conservation Fund. (Video of the hearing can be found [online](#) with testimony on the legislation beginning at 55:20.)

“Texas has always been known for its open spaces, but over the past few decades, our landscape has begun to change,” said State Representative Justin Holland who introduced the legislation. “Our state’s success is a great thing, but with that comes the responsibility as custodians of this land to preserve and pass on a state with wide open spaces for our future generations. We are losing 240,000 acres per year to development and having a very hard time keeping pace with water, infrastructure, transportation, and educational needs.”

Dozens of wildlife, water resource, agriculture, conservation, and outdoor recreation advocates registered their support for both bills, with a number of members of the Texas Land and Water Conservation Coalition testifying on behalf of the bill.

“Our state is a private property state, where over 95% of our land is privately owned ... and I work every day with farmers and ranchers who are just looking at ways to make sure they can keep their land and continue to serve our state by providing the food and fiber it needs to continue to grow,” said Chad Ellis, CEO of the Texas Agricultural Land Trust. “Some of these lands have been passed down for generations, and often times families do struggle to pay estate taxes and preserve ownership during transfers. One of the greatest tools we have in the toolbox to help these families is conservation easements. This bill would create additional avenues to help preserve our critical working lands through conservation easements and other means, and ensure they stay working for Texans for generations to come.”

“I’m here not only because I support the expansion of state and local parks ... but also to highlight the importance of conservation easements and conserving private lands as a critical component of this bill,” said Zach Spector, Director of Conservation Programs at Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation. “Conservation easements are voluntary tools – voluntary tools – that help keep landowners on their land; keep farms and ranches as working lands. We depend on our farmers and ranchers to grow our food, fuel, and fiber. We need these working lands to serve as refugees for fish and wildlife.”

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“The Land and Water Conservation Fund provides a unique opportunity to make great strides in the conservation and preservation of water resources across our great state,” said Suzanne Scott, the Texas State Director for The Nature Conservancy. “This fund would help keep water in our rivers, lakes, streams, and bays, and help ensure we have clean water for our communities to drink in the future. When we conducted polling on this issue in February, 83% of Texans supported the adoption of a constitutional amendment for the land and water conservation fund with strong bipartisan support.”

“I represent one of over 50 organizations who have come together in support of the land and water conservation fund. Our Coalition represents thousands of Texans from across the state”, said Robert Kent, Texas State Director for the Trust for Public Land. “City folks, lifelong ranchers, hunters, fishers, state park enthusiasts and every day families enjoying a day at their neighborhood park. We are united by one common goal: to protect and expand access to Texas’ natural areas, green spaces, and iconic landscapes for the next generation.”

HJR 138 would establish a dedicated fund for conservation. With an historic budget surplus, Texas legislators have a once in a generation opportunity to act now to constitutionally dedicate \$2 billion to create this historic fund. HJR 138 would place the fund on the November ballot, allowing Texas voters to dedicate these funds to protect and preserve the Texas landscape.

HB 3165 creates a governing board that would be led by the General Land Office and include Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and Texas Water Development Board. Through the established conservation fund, the board would provide grants for existing programs and projects that would preserve our water resources, agricultural lands, and wildlife habitats and provide additional outdoor recreational opportunities for all Texans.

The bill provides base eligibility guidelines for projects and ensures that 50% of the funds go toward the conservation of agricultural lands, water resources, and wildlife habitat, and 50% of the funds go toward state and local parks, wildlife management areas, and other public access conservation projects.

Coalition Members

Audubon Texas | Bayou Land Conservancy | Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust | Cibolo Conservancy Land Trust | Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program | Coastal Conservation Association - Texas | Coastal Prairie Conservancy | Colorado River Land Trust | Connemara Conservancy | Conservation Force | Ducks Unlimited | Edwards Aquifer Authority | Environment Texas | Environmental Defense Fund | Fair Park First | Frontera Land Alliance | Galveston Bay Foundation | Great Springs Project Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance | Green Spaces Alliance | Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust | Hill Country Alliance | Hill Country Conservancy | Houston Audubon | Houston Wilderness | Klyde Warren Park | National Parks Conservation Association | National Wildlife Federation | Native Prairies Association of Texas | Pines & Prairies Land Trust | San Marcos River Foundation | Scenic Galveston | Sierra Club - Lone Star Chapter | Southern Gateway | Texan by Nature | Texas 2036 | Texas Agricultural Land Trust | Texas Cave Management Association | Texas Children in Nature Network | Texas Conservation Alliance | Texas Foundation for Conservation | Texas Land Conservancy | Texas

Land Trust Council | Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation | Texas Recreation and Park Society | Texas Wildlife Association | The American Farmland Trust | The Conservation Fund | The Cradle of Texas Conservancy | The Nature Conservancy | The Valley Land Fund | The Watershed Association | The Wildlife Society - Texas Chapter | Travis Audubon | TREAD Coalition | Trinity Park Conservancy | Trust for Public Land | Upper Trinity Conservation Trust | Wilbarger Creek Conservation Alliance

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