

SUPPORTING CONSERVATION OF OPEN SPACE

MAKING PUBLIC LANDS ACCESSIBLE FOR PUBLIC USE

TRAPS Policy Position

- **Protecting conservation of Texas public spaces, native plants and fauna, and public waterways.**
- **Supporting the rights of citizens to access natural areas for recreation.**
- **Supporting access of all citizens inclusively.**

BACKGROUND

Public lands, including parks, trails, beaches and open spaces, represent spaces for all of us to enjoy. Whether it is used for ranchland, wildlife habitat or recreation, public lands are the pride of the nation and help support our quality of life. They're where we go to find inspiration, adventure, and a connection to the American story. More people than ever before are discovering public lands as place to reconnect with nature—and each other. Yet in spite of the growing importance of these spaces, public lands are facing an unprecedented threat.

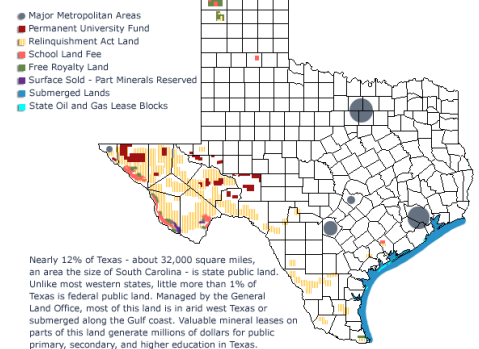
Including the threat of expanding drilling, mining, and logging on public lands—this will close them off to other users. The threat that public lands will be sold to the highest bidder and converted to private lands and the threat to dismantle the nation's most important source of conservation funding, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The Texas Recreation and Park Society (TRAPS) supports the conservation of open space and making our public lands accessible for public use. At its core, supporting our public investments means protecting conservation of Texas public spaces, native plants and fauna, and public waterways. This includes supporting the rights of citizens to access these natural areas for recreation and supporting access for all citizens inclusively.

WHY CONGRESS SHOULD ACT

According to a survey conducted in 2009, nearly 83 percent of Texans agreed that conservation of natural areas was a “core Lone Star value.” Despite the support of Texans for conservation, we fall short of the national goals in regard to available parkland. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommends that communities provide 25 acres of local public parkland per 1,000 people. The current state average is about 13.9 acres per 1,000 people. Nearly 12% of Texas, only 32,000 square miles is state public land. Studies also show that as communities grow, there is a greater need for access to state and local parks. Since the 2010 census, Texas has added 12.6 percent more people. For each year between 2010 and 2016, Texas has had the nation's largest annual population growth. During this period, the state added about 211,000 people per year through natural increase.

Texas Public Lands



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BENEFITS OF ACCESSING PUBLIC LANDS

Open space provides public access to natural areas including lakes, rivers, streams and meadows. It provides opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hiking, boating, fishing, hunting, camping or bird watching. All these activities help people stay healthy and active while enjoying the outdoors and connecting with nature. Children should have the opportunity to climb a tree, catch a fish or roast marshmallows over a campfire. Direct experience with nature is vital to physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Yet, as the population becomes more urbanized and open space continues to be fragmented and developed, more children today are growing up without these experiences. State parks, wildlife management areas, and local municipalities can offer a variety of opportunities to experience the outdoors. Protecting, enhancing and increasing recreational opportunities and ensuring that all Texans have access to the outdoors for education, recreation and rejuvenation is TRAPS's mission.



OPEN SPACE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

A recent study found that protecting open space helps economic growth in at least four measurable ways. They are: increases property values of nearby property, attracts new businesses and employees, improves bond ratings, and stimulates tourism. Businesses are increasingly attracted to amenities such as greenways, parks, preserves, and trails, which improve the lives of their employees. Middle and high level executives increasingly choose to work in areas that offer a high standard of living, including proximity to open space.

Dr. John Crompton, professor at Texas A&M University, reports that parks "often increase the value of proximate properties, and the resultant incremental increase in revenues that governments receive from the higher property taxes is frequently sufficient to pay the acquisition and development costs of the amenities." Numerous studies have shown that properties located close to parks and greenbelts are valued higher than those located just 1,000 feet away.

Bond rating agencies have recognized that unlimited or mismanaged growth can threaten a community's fiscal health while land conservation and sound planning can help sustain. As a result, bond agencies have raised communities' bond ratings because of their efforts to preserve open space.

Parks also generate money from tourist spending, which helps generate money for hotels, restaurants, and other sectors of the local economy. Every year, Americans and international tourists flock to forests, deserts, beaches, and mountains to enjoy the vastness and recreation provided to them by nature.

With its many forms and uses, open space will continue to play a vital role in sustaining the social, economic, and ecological well-being of all Texans. We need to do our part in conserving Texas open spaces and supporting the rights of citizens to access these natural areas for recreation.

<https://www.tpl.org/save-our-public-lands#sm.0001cr592kkktevtzrn2oheyroo2q>
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/public-land-is-a-civil-right_us_587124efe4b0a5e600a78b49
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<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/texas-population-trends.html>
<https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/land-and-water-plan>
<http://www.hillcountryalliance.org/PublicLands>
<http://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/this-land-is-whose-land.aspx>



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