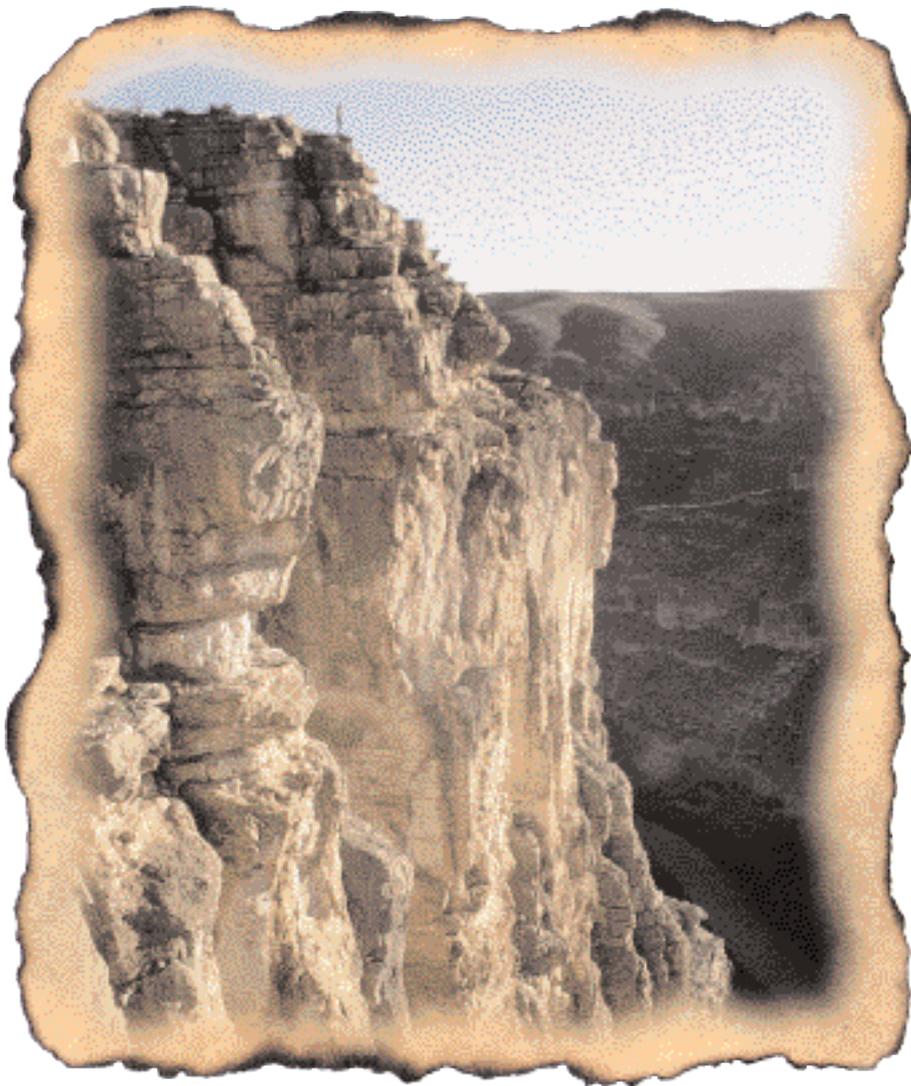


NATURE TOURISM IN THE LONE STAR STATE



Economic Opportunities in Nature

A report from the State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism.

C O N T E N T S



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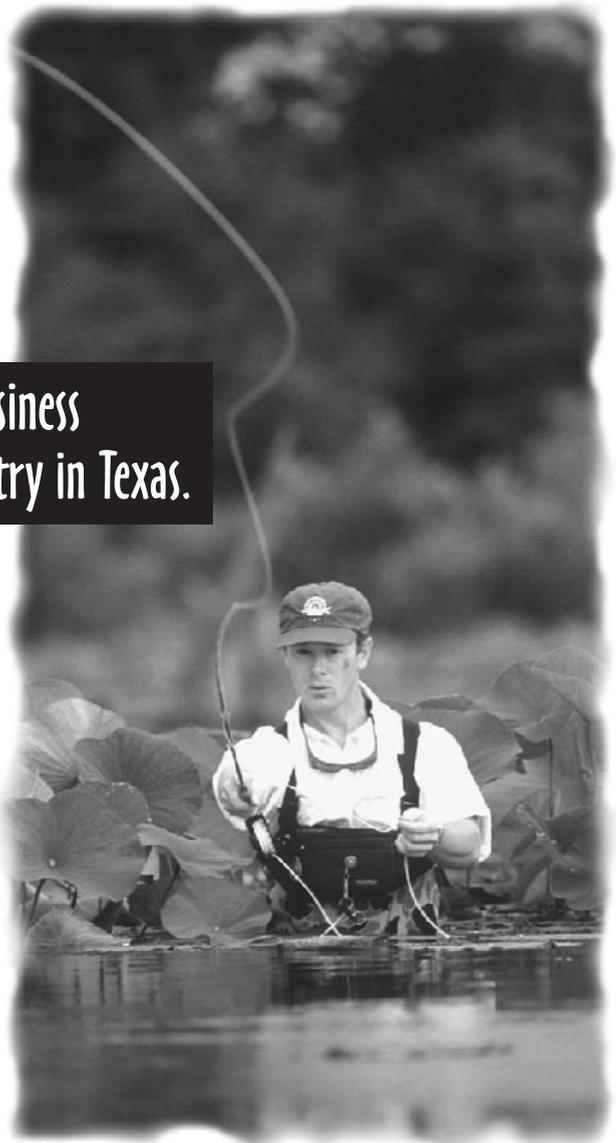
Experts agree that, by the turn of the century, the largest industry in Texas may not be manufacturing, oil and gas, or agriculture. Chances are that it will be tourism, today a \$23 billion business in Texas and rapidly expanding.¹ An important component of this burgeoning industry is nature tourism, itself one of the fastest growing segments of global travel.

Tourism is a \$23 billion business and the 3rd largest industry in Texas.

This increasing interest in nature tourism offers new economic opportunities for private landowners, rural communities, cities and others interested in making tourism their business.

Nature tourism, as defined by this task force, is “discretionary travel to natural areas that conserves the environmental, social and cultural values while generating an economic benefit to the local community.” In other words, nature tourists are travelers who spend their time and money enjoying and appreciating a broad range of outdoor activities that have a minimum impact on the environment.

Hunting and fishing are the traditional mainstays of nature tourism in Texas. A report in *Field & Stream* magazine puts Texas far ahead of any other state in retail hunting spending — \$1.07 billion compared to second-place California’s \$536 million. Yet, in recent years, the most significant market growth has been in “non-consumptive” activities, in this report to be termed outdoor appreciation. This includes wildlife and bird watching, nature study and photography, backpacking, hiking, boating, camping, rafting, biking, climbing and a variety of similar pursuits.



Fly fishing for black bass on Pur tis Creek. © David Sams

The task force was given the following mission:

- Examine the potential for nature tourism in Texas.
- Recommend opportunities for developing and promoting it.
- Build upon local efforts already underway.
- Preserve local, social and cultural values.
- Promote sustainable economic growth, restorative economic development and environmental conservation through nature tourism.



E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y



Texas is internationally known as a destination for nature tourists. Throngs of hunters, anglers, campers, bird watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts travel to Texas every year in pursuit of their favorite outdoor activity. Texas ranks first in the number of hunting days provided annually, and second in fishing. Texas is also the premier bird watching destination in the U.S., according to an American Birding Association survey in 1993. Yet to date no comprehensive state policy or program to coordinate and promote nature tourism in Texas has been formulated.

Recognizing this need, a special State Task Force appointed by the governor convened in Austin on November 9, 1993, to develop a report on the economic opportunities on nature tourism in Texas. The State Task Force has been co-chaired by Andrew Sansom, Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Deborah Kastrin, Executive Director of the Texas Department of Commerce.

Membership has included a broad range of Texas interests, reflecting the viewpoint of cities, rural communities, the tourism industry, private landholders, state agencies, non-profit and educational institutions, various ethnic groups, businesses and conservationists.

Since its appointment, the State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism and its committees have met more than a dozen times, gathering information from experts and citizens and discussing ways to improve nature tourism in Texas. The results of these investigations and discussions are incorporated in this report. The report is a thorough look at nature tourism as it exists today, and a recommended plan of action for increasing its economic and conservation potential for Texas.

The report is intended for the governor's office, state legislators, landowners, cities, rural communities and citizens interested in increasing nature tourism.



Bird watching on the Upper Texas Coast. Photo TPWD





The recommendations of the task force fall into four categories: Conservation, Education, Legislation and Promotion. The recommendations briefly presented here will be discussed in full detail in later sections of this report.

EIGHT OF THE TOP TWENTY REASONS NON-TEXANS VACATION IN TEXAS

- Beautiful scenery
- Attractive beaches
- State parks
- Lakes and boating
- Fresh and saltwater fishing
- Good campgrounds
- Good hiking trails
- Dude ranches

Source: TDOC/GSD&M study, McNabb.

CONSERVATION:

- Provide incentives to private landowners to preserve natural habitats.
- Manage public land, such as state parks and wildlife management areas, for the enrichment and continuance of wildlife diversity.
- Acquire additional recreational lands with unique nature tourism elements, but only from willing sellers.
- Develop resource conservation programs to restore diminished resources such as native grasslands and reintroduce native fauna such as bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope and bison that attract nature tourists.
- Identify and categorize existing and potential nature tourism resources, and assess and monitor the impacts of nature tourism.



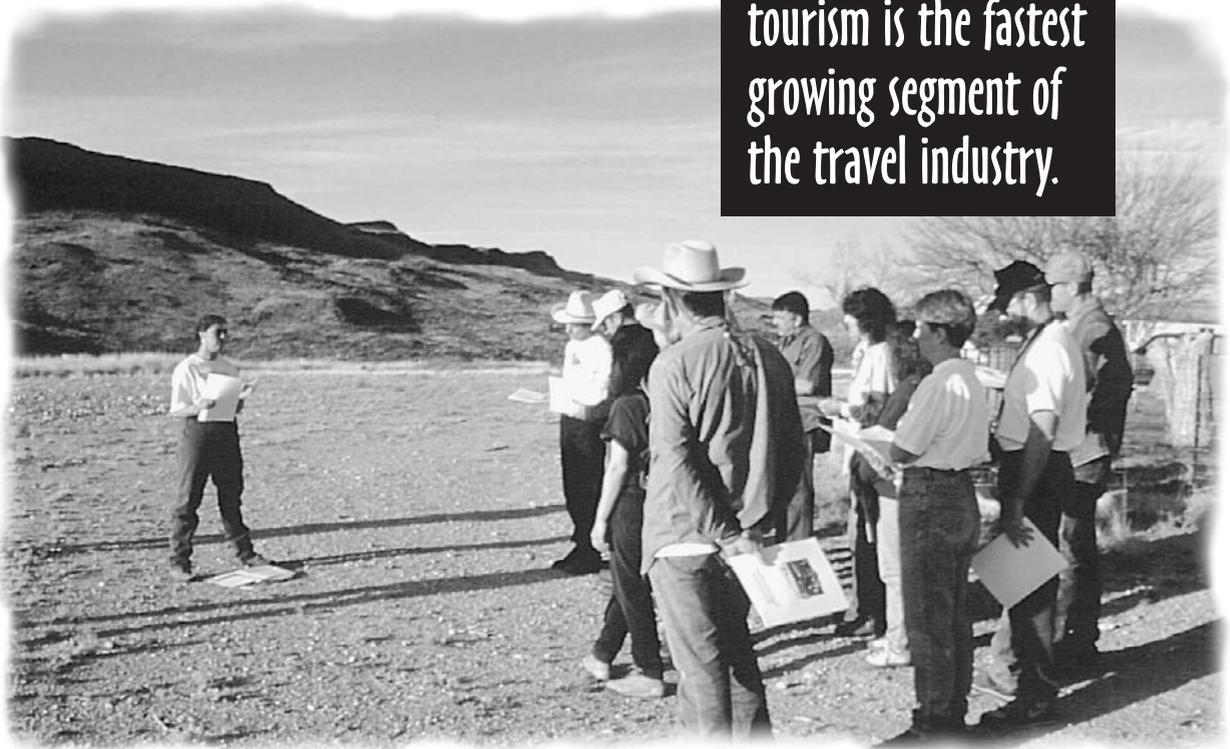
Seminole Canyon State Park. © Stephan Meyers



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Nature-related
tourism is the fastest
growing segment of
the travel industry.**



Black Gap Wildlife Management Area. Photo TPWD

EDUCATION:

- Create a training program for rural community leaders, tourism-related business managers and prospective business persons.
- Develop a nature tourism handbook for communities and landowners.
- Facilitate the development of local tourism infrastructures to support consumer needs.
- Communicate the importance of preserving and managing Texas' natural resources to communities, landowners and the public and inform them, through public awareness efforts, of the state's programs to conserve wildlife and habitat.

NATURE-BASED RECREATION GROWTH TRENDS THROUGH THE YEAR 2000

• Backpacking	up 34%
• Day hiking	up 31%
• Bicycling	up 25%
• Outdoor photography	up 23%
• Wildlife watching	up 16%
• Camping	up 16%
• Canoeing / Kayaking	up 13%
• Rafting / Tubing	up 11%

National Average.
Sources: Recreation Executive Report, May 1994, from U.S. Forest Service data.



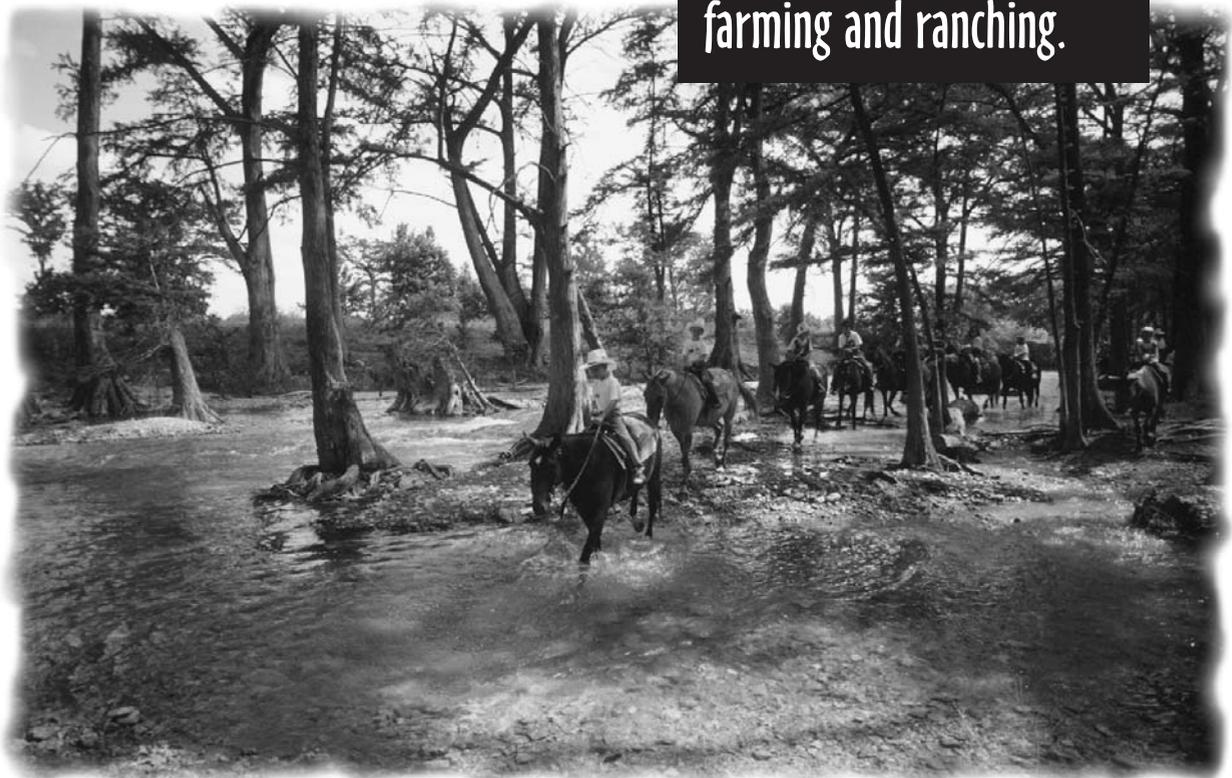
E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y



LEGISLATION:

- Seek legislation, a joint resolution or a constitutional amendment to allow rural landowners to manage their property solely for wildlife without losing their agricultural exemption from ad valorem taxation.
- Amend Texas transportation laws so that chauffeur and bus companies transporting tourists to and from rural Texas communities can operate as common carriers and broker freight to increase profitability and efficiencies.
- Support probate relief for landowners who obligate themselves to manage their land as wildlife habitat. As an example, explore federal probate tax credits in exchange for conservation easements.
- Develop an insurance program for landowners who are interested in providing for nature tourism on their lands.
- Landowners presently are granted a limitation from liability regarding recreational activities as long as revenues received do not exceed twice the previous calendar year's ad valorem tax. Remove this cap.

Rural landowners engaged in Nature Tourism should have the same tax advantages allowed for farming and ranching.



Twin Elms Ranch. Courtesy *Texas Highways Magazine*.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hikers on the Mesa De Anguila, Big Bend National Park. © Tracy Lynch

Wildlife viewing is the number one outdoor activity in the U.S.

PROMOTION:

- Facilitate the establishment of a non-profit industry organization, the Texas Nature Tourism Association (TNTA), with membership to include landowners, tourism managers, regulatory agencies, tour operators, guides, conservation groups, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus and service providers.

The TNTA would:

1. Develop voluntary guidelines for nature tourism sites and providers.
2. Assist in the promotion of nature tourism in Texas.
3. Assist in developing and coordinating an overall marketing strategy and individual marketing elements for nature tourism in Texas.
4. Establish a Texas Nature Tourism Information Center to provide centralized access for those seeking nature tourism and travel information.
5. Conduct demonstration programs in various regions of the state to show the benefits of nature tourism.



Texas Horned Lizard. Photo TPWD





Texas Gulf Coast. Photo TPWD

Texans, like all Americans, are turning more and more to outdoor recreational activities. Nationally, outdoor recreation has more participants than the combined total of those who own a pet, tend a garden or attend professional sports events, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association. More people photograph wildlife than play golf.

Nature tourism is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry, averaging a 30 percent annual increase each year since 1987.² Worldwide, nature tourism sales were expected to total \$238 billion in 1994.³

A record 157 million domestic visitors traveled to Texas last year, solidifying the state's ranking as the second-most visited state in the nation after California, according to the Texas Department of Commerce. California had 258 million visitors, while Florida ranked third with 133 million visitors. Leisure travel accounted for 67 percent of all travel to Texas, with business travel accounting for 33 percent.

TOP TEN OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL SPORTS IN THE U.S.

Activity	Participants in (millions)
1. Wildlife viewing	76.5
2. Fitness walking	69.6
3. Camping	47.1
4. Fishing	35.6
5. Hiking	22.7
6. Hunting	14.1
7. Canoeing, Kayaking, Rafting	14.0
8. Backpacking	10.4
9. Mountain biking	5.0
10. Rock climbing, Mountaineering	4.1

Sources: *Recreation Executive Report*, May 1994.

The potential for nature tourism in Texas is immeasurable. Texas is blessed with an unparalleled diversity of wildlife and habitats. We have deserts and bayous, forests and grasslands, mountains and canyons. We have rare species of birds and animals, many found nowhere else in the United States. Game is plentiful, and Texas has more white-tailed deer than any other state. Our saltwater and freshwater fishing ranks among the very best. All of these resources create opportunities for nature tourism.



O P P O R T U N I T I E S I N N A T U R E



Already, nature tourism is establishing itself as a major economic force in Texas. Tourism itself is a \$23 billion industry—the third largest industry in the state. Tourism in Texas supports 419,000 jobs and a \$7.5 billion payroll. Tourists make more than 162 million trips to Texas each year.⁴

The U.S. Travel Data Center reports that, in tax dollars alone, tourism brings \$856 million to the state coffers each year, and \$630 million in local tax receipts.

According to a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department study, visitors to Texas state parks spent \$179 million in 1993, and the estimated total economic impact was \$477 million.⁵ An estimated \$3.6 billion was spent on fishing, hunting and wildlife associated recreation in Texas in 1993.⁶

In 1991, hunting activities in Texas generated an estimated \$1 billion.⁷ Sales included hunting supplies, travel and other expenses.

Hunting expenditures in turn generated \$474.5 million in salaries and wages, 23,370 jobs, and \$104.9 million in state and federal taxes.

While hunting and fishing remain a substantial part of the picture, the rapid growth is expected in other areas of outdoor recreation. Regionally, the number of hunters has been holding steady since 1980, and the number of anglers has increased 27 percent since 1980. But the number of wildlife appreciation participants has increased 61 percent in the same period.

In Texas, hunting license sales increased 5 percent from 1992 to 1993, but are down 12 percent since 1983. Texas sport fishing license sales increased 3 percent from 1992 to 1993, but are down 11 percent since 1983. However, there were 25 million visits to state parks in 1993, up 40 percent since 1983.



Lease hunting for quail. © Robert Liles





WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 1994

ECONOMIC FOCUS

Birding Trail Takes Aim At Affluent Eco-Tourist



Nature tourism clearly helps fuel urban, rural and regional economies in Texas. Some smaller communities rely on these dollars for their very survival.

The Wall Street Journal reported last August that bird watchers are “some of the most affluent travelers around,” and they’re bringing a lot of their money to Texas. The article reported state plans for a 500-mile automobile touring route, known as The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, which will stretch from Port Arthur to Brownsville and direct nature tourists to more than 50 popular bird watching sites.

According to the newspaper article, the revenue generated by this trail alone could prove significant. The newspaper reported the following examples of economic benefits from nature tourism:

- About 6,000 bird watchers poured into tiny High Island during a six-week period in the spring of 1992, spending some \$2.5 million in lodging and other travel-related activities.⁸ The total economic impact was

estimated at between \$4 million and \$6 million in a two-month period. This coastal woodland near Houston is known internationally as a bird watching site.

- Between 75,000 and 100,000 tourists visit Aransas each year to view vast flocks of migratory birds, providing at least a \$5 million boost to the local economy, according to Diane Probst, executive director of the Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Captain Ted’s Whooping Crane Tours reported the number of its annual customers has grown to between 8,000 and 10,000 from less than 1,000 a decade ago. At \$28 a head, the tours generate enough income to let the owners take off half the year.
- Six years ago, Rockport inaugurated its first HummerBird Celebration in honor of the hummingbirds which migrate through the area. In 1994, this festival attracted approximately 4,000 visitors, who spent well over \$1 million, according to the Chamber of Commerce.



Whooping Crane tour along the Central Texas Coast. © Bill Reaves





Are there other “Opportunities in Nature” in Texas? The opportunities are as diverse as our flora and fauna.

In Texas, the number of Texans participating in nature study is expected to grow to 18 million people by the year 2000, an increase of 17 percent from 1990.⁹

The Big Bend area offers a unique look at the nature tourism phenomenon; few people go there for any other reason. Big Bend National Park estimates that visitors add \$23.5 million a year to the area economy. Chief Naturalist Dennis Vasquez reports that 312,140 visitors were drawn to the park in 1992. About 40 percent of them spent more than \$250 during a typical two-day visit, with an average spending-per-visitor of \$43. This spending on lodging (40%), food (25%), travel (20%) and other items (15%) benefited the regional economy within a 100-mile radius of the park. The top three visitor drawing cards cited were scenic views and drives, the desert experience and viewing park wildlife, and the wilderness environment.

Nature tourism in Big Bend is not, however, limited to the National Park. For example, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department acquired the 269,000-acre Big Bend Ranch State Natural Area in 1988, and recently adopted a management plan to increase public access. It has added bus tours, nature programs, primitive camping, hiking trails and other activities, and plans to seek proposals from private guide services for backpacking, educational workshops, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, instructional services, photography, seminars, sightseeing, vehicular tours and other ideas

to increase public use of the land, which is just west of the national park.

Studies are now underway to document the economic impact of nature tourism in the South Texas/Rio Grande Valley region. Meanwhile, nature preserve managers and scientists estimate that nature tourism, especially bird watching, pumps tens of millions of dollars into the Valley economy each year.

For example, *Texas Wildlife Viewing Guide* author Dr. Gary Graham says one Valley bird—the yellow-green vireo—generates an estimated \$100,000 per year in local spending.

In 1992, bird watchers generated \$4-6 million economic impact along the Upper Texas Coast.

The Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge near Brownsville has the only confirmed nesting record of this species in the nation. The vireos have returned every year since 1988, and with them the bird watchers. “People fly in from all over the U.S. just to see this one bird,” says Graham. “They land at the airport, rent a car, drive out to see the bird, go back to spend the night in Brownsville and then fly back to New York or wherever they live.” Melvin Maxwell of the refuge staff says car counters show the site draws about 200,000 visitors per year. Of these, he says about 75% come from outside the Valley, drawn mainly by the chance to see high wildlife diversity in a relatively small area. The refuge has documented 393 species of birds—to their knowledge more than any other national refuge in the U.S.



PROFILE OF THE NATURE TOURIST



Who are these nature tourists? A variety of studies presents a picture of the nature tourism consumer. The general consensus is that there are several types of nature-based tourists, depending on the activity.

Hunters and anglers tend to be Anglo males who live in urban areas and are high school graduates or above.¹⁰ Nature tourists involved in outdoor appreciation are more evenly divided between male and female (60 percent male, 40 percent female).¹¹ Texans who use state parks are almost evenly divided between male and female. They have annual household incomes of \$25,000 to \$75,000, range from 25 to 54 years of age, and are generally Anglo or Hispanic.¹²

Texas birders are generally middle-aged, well-educated and financially successful. Sixty percent are men and 40 percent are women.⁸

Nature tourists want to be involved in the tourism experience, according to a 1992 survey by Clemson University.¹⁴ They're not just passive observers. Nature tourists travel to: (1) experience natural phenomena, (2) learn about nature, (3) be physically active, and (4) meet people with similar interests. They are attracted to mountains and oceansides, wilderness and undisturbed nature, birds, trees and wildflowers, lakes and streams, wildlife, parks and rural areas.¹⁵

American Birding Association members list Texas as the most popular destination for birding tours over the past 5 years.



Bird watching at King Ranch. © Barton Wilder custom images



PROFILE OF THE NATURE TOURIST



In a survey contracted by the Texas Department of Commerce in 1994, non-Texans were asked to identify top vacation attributes. The survey showed that two of the top ten attributes—pretty scenery and beautiful beaches—are nature based. Other nature-related

Texas State Parks received 25 million visitors in 1993. That's a 40 percent increase since 1983.

activities which scored high are state parks, lakes and boating, fresh/saltwater fishing, good campgrounds, good hiking trails and dude ranches.¹⁵

A 1992 Clemson University survey showed that at least six dimensions of nature-based tourists exist: Education and history travelers, social travelers, relaxation travelers, nature travelers, economic and weekend travelers and camping travelers.¹⁶

It is important to know, however, that a segment of nature-based tourists desire condominiums and not campgrounds as their lodging type. This suggests that tourism planners and developers must offer a mix of accommodation types if they are to attract the nature-based tourism market.



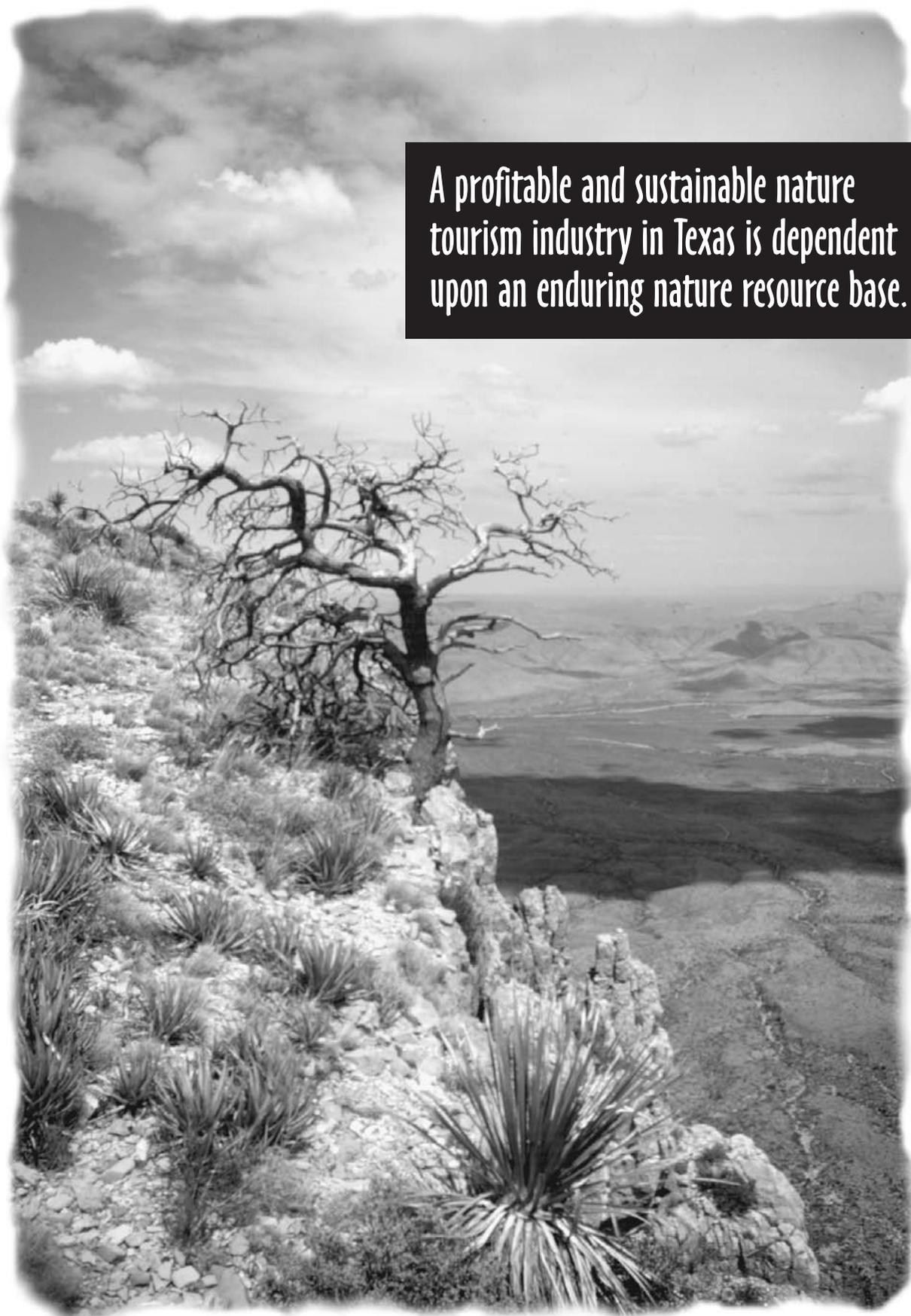
Fishing on Caddo Lake. © Photo TDOC



NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



A profitable and sustainable nature tourism industry in Texas is dependent upon an enduring nature resource base.



Sierra Diablo. Photo by Ed Dutch, TPWD.

NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



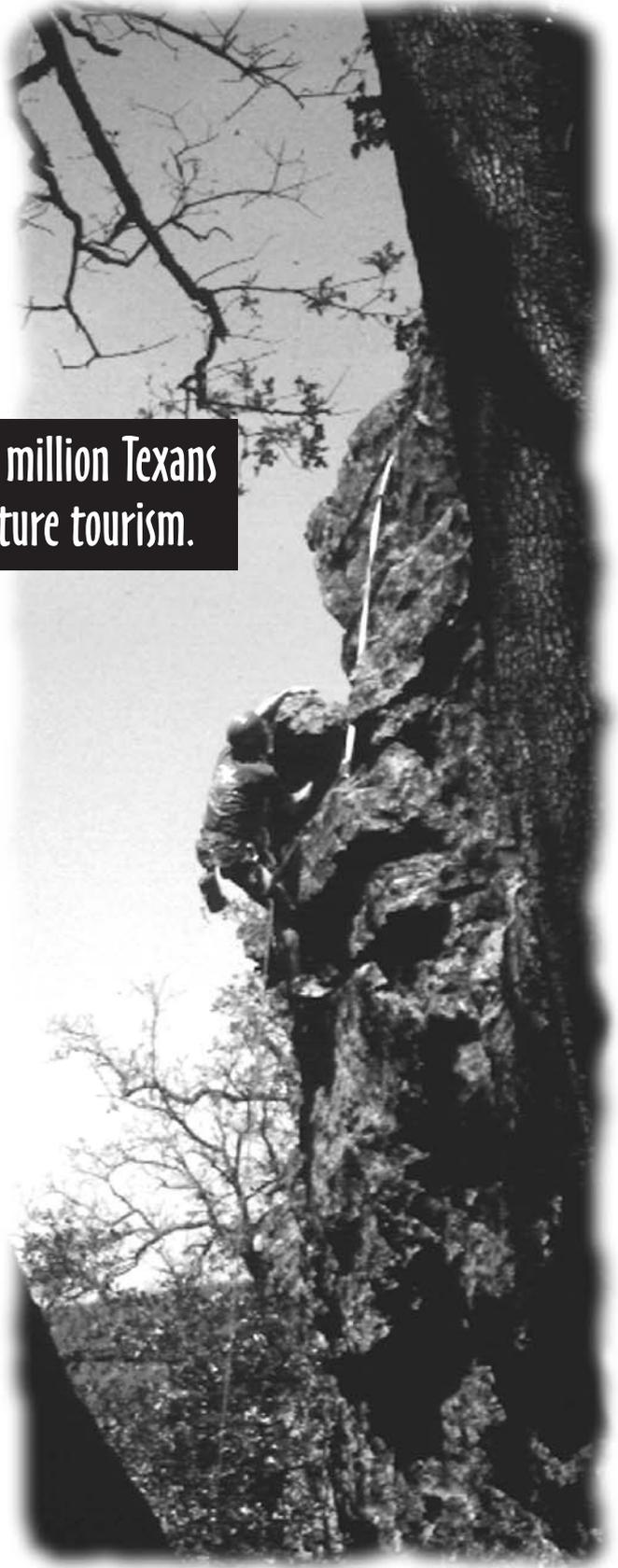
It is going to take the combined talents, creativity and resources of government, landowners, representatives of cities and rural areas, the travel industry, the conservation community and other interested parties to position Texas to take advantage of the growing interest in nature travel.

The state must devote its resources and talents to identify and coordinate marketing activities among public and private sectors to develop

By the year 2000, 18 million Texans will participate in nature tourism.

nature tourism. In addition, the state should develop effective integrated nature, cultural and heritage tourism programs and policies. The programs should be developed across all social and economic levels.

A profitable and sustainable nature tourism industry in Texas is dependent upon an enduring nature resource base. Conservation, education, legislation and promotion must be intrinsically linked if Texas is to succeed in competing globally as a nature tourism destination. To this end, the State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism is recommending a number of specific actions.



Rock climbing at Lake Mineral Wells State Park. © Ed Arrington





Central Texas Coast. Photo TPWD

Conservation of nature resources in Texas should be based generally upon a three-pronged strategy:

- Provide incentives to private landowners to preserve natural habitats.
- Manage public lands, such as state parks and wildlife management areas, for the enrichment and continuance of wildlife diversity.
- Lease or acquire additional lands from willing sellers where TPWD is able to manage, enhance and conserve habitats for all wildlife diversity to provide for a wide range of recreational opportunities.
- In addition, better utilize mitigation funds for acquiring and enhancing lands that may additionally function as nature tourism destinations.

Compared to other states and countries that are promoting nature tourism, the amount of publicly-owned land per capita in Texas

is low (97 percent of Texas land is privately held). Thus, developing a close working relationship with landowners, and providing more recreational land for Texas, are critical.

The state should pursue a broad-based strategy to secure consistent, sustainable funding for an enhanced natural resource base. This responsibility lies with many governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), landowners and private individuals.



Bighorn sheep. Photo TPWD





We recommend therefore that private and public sector efforts in nature tourism and resource conservation activities be coordinated. Local, state, federal and private sector organizations and companies should be identified according to current areas of responsibility and potential needs. In this way, we can avoid duplication of effort.

A memorandum of understanding or inter-agency agreement should be developed between related agencies, and an inter-agency/private sector task force should be established to facilitate nature tourism conservation activities. The nature tourism component within the current Strategic Travel and Tourism Plan should be enhanced and expanded.

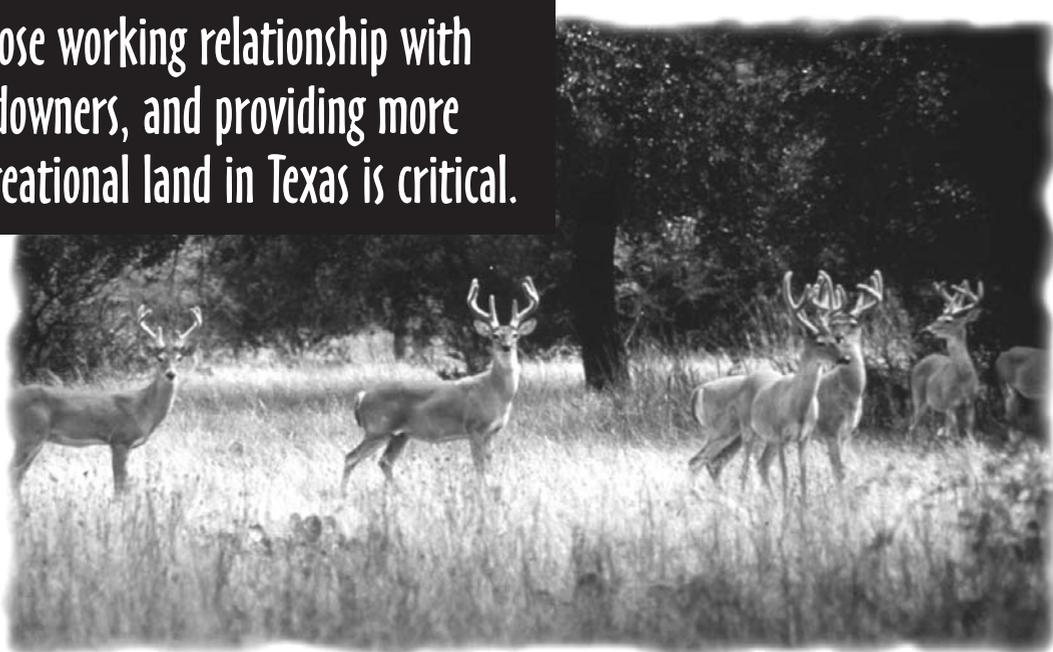
Although historically present in the state, such “charismatic megafauna” as buffalo, elk and bear that attracts many nature tourists are lacking in Texas. However, rare

species such as the whooping crane and large flocks of birds such as the snow geese and sandhill cranes wintering in Texas are sensual equivalents.

The state needs to develop resource restoration programs to recover diminished assets such as native grasslands and reintroduce appropriate native fauna such as bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope and bison that could function as attractions for nature tourists. Sites that exemplify and exhibit pre-colonial Texas nature resources should be identified and protected.

Nature tourists traveling to Texas desire to experience the essence of natural Texas. Yet, even the agencies charged with protecting these assets rarely agree on the definition and delineation of these resources. The state needs to identify and categorize the existing and potential nature tourism resources, and assess and monitor the impacts of nature tourism.

A close working relationship with landowners, and providing more recreational land in Texas is critical.



Texas white-tailed deer. Photo TPWD





Texas is undergoing a fundamental economic restructuring, with populations moving from rural communities to urban centers. According to a report from Texas Rural Communities Incorporated, only 18 percent of the state's population resides in 204 rural counties. Those rural counties west of Interstate 35 have experienced dramatic population losses, with many communities losing up to one third of their population in the last ten years.

62 percent of rural communities say they would like to implement tourism programs.

According to this report, 62 percent of rural communities have indicated they would like to implement programs that would increase visitation in their communities. They believe that visitors bring additional dollars to a community without using costly services such as schools and jails.

In fact, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service recently conducted a state-wide needs assessment at the county level resulting in 213 counties of 254 expressing overwhelming need for outreach and educational programs focused on economic development, tourism development, leadership training, capacity building and quality of life. In excess of 700 requests were received.

Training rural community leaders to develop strategies to attract tourism is critical. State agencies, organizations and educational facilities serving rural Texas should be used to create these training

programs. In particular, trained nature tourism interpreters and guides are needed to staff nature tourism sites and facilities in rural Texas.



Canoeing in the Trans Pecos. Photo TPWD



E D U C A T I O N



The educational programs should, at a minimum include the following:

- Develop a step-by-step nature tourism handbook targeted to communities and private landowners.
- Provide training and outreach for local communities, individuals and companies to nurture and enhance nature tourism in their areas.
- Enable the development of local tourism infrastructures to support the nature consumer's needs.
- Provide training for public and private sector employees who interact with the public concerning basic hospitality skills and nature tourism opportunities in their areas.

- Identify and coordinate public and private organizations with the financial resources and expertise to help communities and individuals in their nature tourism efforts.
- Identify nature tourism products and infrastructure which are both available and needed to promote sustainable growth and environmental conservation.
- Develop programs to communicate the importance of protecting and managing Texas' nature resources.

**Some smaller communities
rely on nature tourism dollars
for their very survival.**



Caprock Canyon State Park tour, Quitaque Texas. © Wyman Meinzer.





Legislation is needed in four areas to promote nature tourism: 1) property tax relief for lands devoted to wildlife management and nature tourism; 2) incentives for transportation companies serving rural areas; 3) limitation of liability, and 4) federal probate relief for landowners who manage their land for wildlife habitat and out-door recreation. The four are discussed in detail below:

- In order to receive relief from ad valorem property taxes, Texas landowners now must operate their farms and ranches for agricultural purposes. Some would prefer to manage their property solely for wildlife, but cannot afford to lose their agricultural exemption. With this situation in mind, the task force is recommending that the state seek legislation, a joint resolution, or a constitutional amendment to ensure tax relief for rural landowners engaged in wildlife management.
- Transportation of tourists to and from rural Texas communities is logistically difficult and, at times, marginally profitable for the chauffeur, taxi or bus company. Texas transportation laws should be amended to allow such companies to operate as common carriers and broker freight, thus increasing efficiencies and profit margins. This would entice more operators into these rural Texas regions.

Effective January 1, 1995, federal legislation will largely preempt state regulations of trucking. The new federal law reads: “a State... may not enact or enforce a law... related to a price, route or service of

any motor carrier... with respect to the transportation of property.”

Although the law does not affect bus operators, the ability of these operators to transport property may be allowed. Guidance is needed from the Texas Railroad Commission.

- Many Texas landowners are hesitant to allow public access to their lands because of liability exposure. Under the current codes, landowners who wish to allow public access for recreational purposes have limited liability unless the owner has “acted with malicious intent or in bad faith.” Current law also allows the landowner to charge for entry to the premises, “but the total charges collected in the previous calendar year for all recreational use... may not be more than twice the total amount of ad valorem taxes...” This revenue cap needs to be removed.

In addition, an insurance program needs to be developed for recreational users and landowners engaged in nature tourism.

- The average age of rural Texas residents is ten years older than the mean for the state, and the average age of farmers and ranchers, which constitute the largest land-asset base, is nearly 60. As the descendants of the farmers and ranchers inherit the land, many are forced to sell or subdivide the property. Such fragmentation has lessened the contiguous wildlife acreage in the state.

One form of relief would be to offer federal probate tax credits in exchange for conservation easements.





Quality control, a centralized source of information, demonstration programs, promotional materials, a coordinated advertising campaign and targeted marketing are some of the promotional needs. They are discussed in detail below:

- It is in the best interests of the nature tourism industry to develop voluntary guidelines for operators, providers and sites that wish to be certified for quality nature tourism. The state should encourage the establishment of a not-for-profit industry organization which could be known as the Texas Nature Tourism Association (TNTA).

This association would promote quality control and would attract members from the entire nature tourism spectrum: site managers, regulatory agencies, tour operators, conservation organizations, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus, lodging, food service and other providers.

The TNTA would develop voluntary guidelines to promote quality sites and providers. In addition, the TNTA would



assist in marketing and development of nature tourism in Texas.

- Texas must facilitate nature tourist visitation to remain competitive with other states and countries. To that end, the TNTA should establish a Texas Nature Tourism Information Center, and adopt and promote technologies allowing tourists and the industry to directly access the center. Callers would be able to obtain information directly, or receive a source where information might be obtained.
- Because nature tourism has been recognized only recently as an economic force, few models exist to demonstrate its potential. Pilot programs should be conducted in various regions of the state to document the benefits of nature tourism. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department sites could be included in these pilot programs. Information gleaned from these test cases should be presented in reports and made available to the public. In addition, case studies should be conducted at existing destinations outside the TPWD system.



Austin Nature Center. Photo TPWD



P R O M O T I O N



- The TNTA should assist in developing an overall marketing strategy and individual marketing elements for nature tourism in Texas. This would include a generic “rack” brochure for statewide use. The publication would highlight the Texas Nature Tourism Center’s telephone number and data link. Distribution would be made through the Texas Department of Transportation’s Travel Information Centers, Texas state parks, convention and visitors bureaus, gateway airports and other venues.

In addition, the Texas Nature Tourism Center’s telephone number and data link should be prominently displayed in promotional materials produced by state agencies. A common theme line and logo should be developed, as well as advertising templates

that can be used by communities, private landowners and governmental agencies to promote nature tourism destinations. Advertising should include print ad slicks and radio scripts. A Public Service Announcement for television should be considered.

- Texas is competing in the nature tourism market with states and countries that have developed sophisticated and well-funded marketing programs. The state needs to develop a marketing campaign targeted to the trade, including the international tourist. Specific market research should be conducted to identify and prioritize both present and potential Texas nature tourists and the activities and experiences they desire



View from the South Rim, Chisos Mountains. Photo TPWD



C O N C L U S I O N



One concept separates Texans from all other people of the world and that is an extraordinary sense of place.

Our lands and waters comprise the richest nature heritage of all the states and this diverse resource base has given rise to a unique identity and pride which is the basis of our culture. These magnificent natural assets and our individuality itself combine to make Texas one of the world's most intriguing destinations today.

Texas is a place where adventure is literally at our fingertips because it is as accessible as it is vast. Texas is a place of exploration because many of its most exciting outdoor opportunities are little known and challenging to reach. Texas is a place of learning as its natural wonders include many of the earth's rarest plants and creatures. Texas is a

place of unparalleled outdoor sportsmanship because of its tradition of private land stewardship. And thus, Texas is once again positioned to realize a new and exciting prosperity from our abundant natural resources.

In developing our future economy, however, we needn't exhaust our natural treasure in order to profit from it. In fact, the full measure of Texas in the next century will only be realized if our vision is inclusive of sustainability along with profitability.

That is the essence of the Nature Tourism challenge, and we firmly believe that Nature Tourism is an exciting economic opportunity for our great state. Equally important, it is by its very definition, an affirmation of our determination to protect, to enjoy and to share a marvelous place of unique resources and lasting values.



The big catch. © Robert Liles



R E F E R E N C E S



- 1 Texas Department of Commerce, 1993 Data.
- 2 1992 World Tourism Organization (WTO)/Texas Department of Commerce.
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