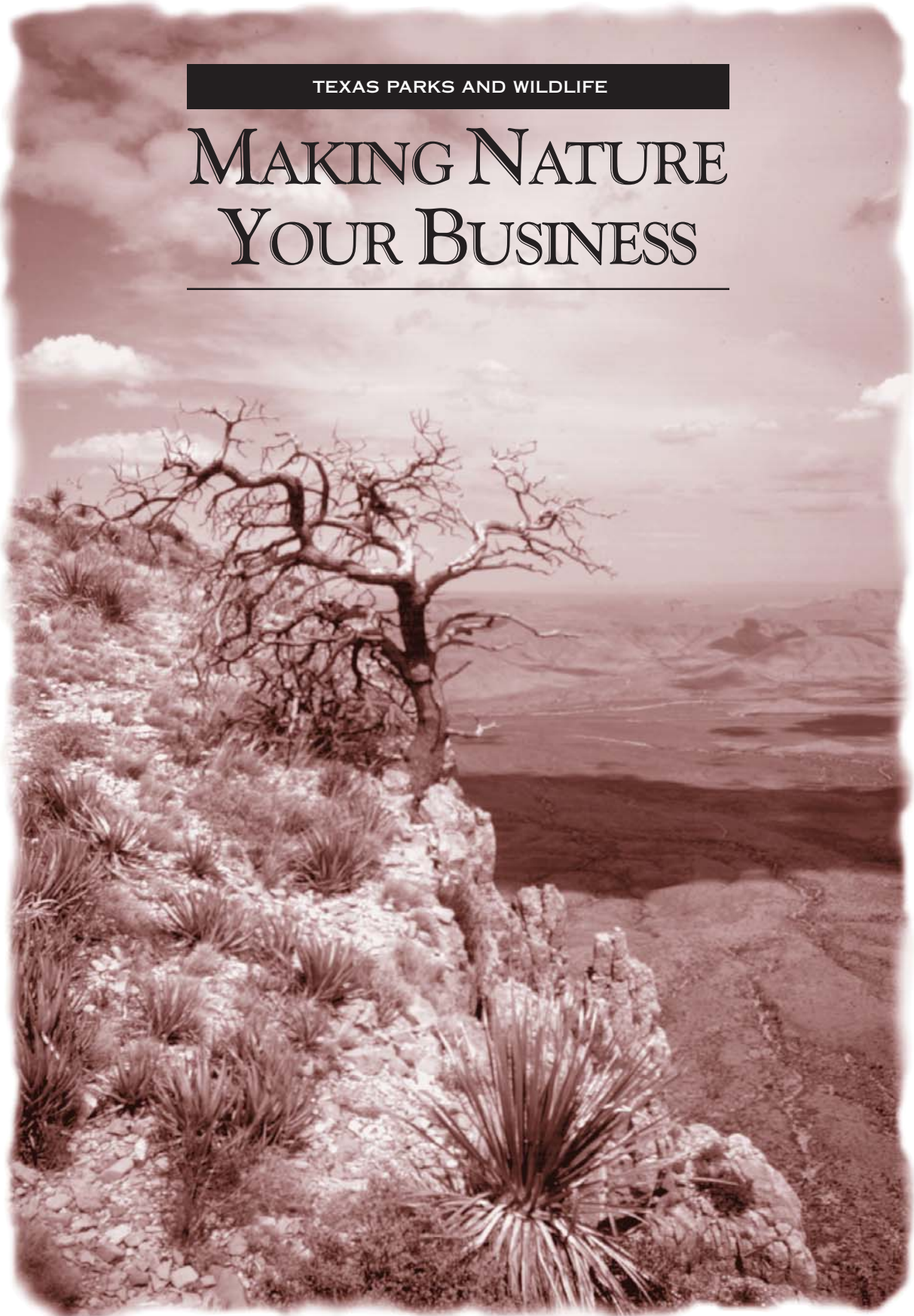


TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

MAKING NATURE YOUR BUSINESS

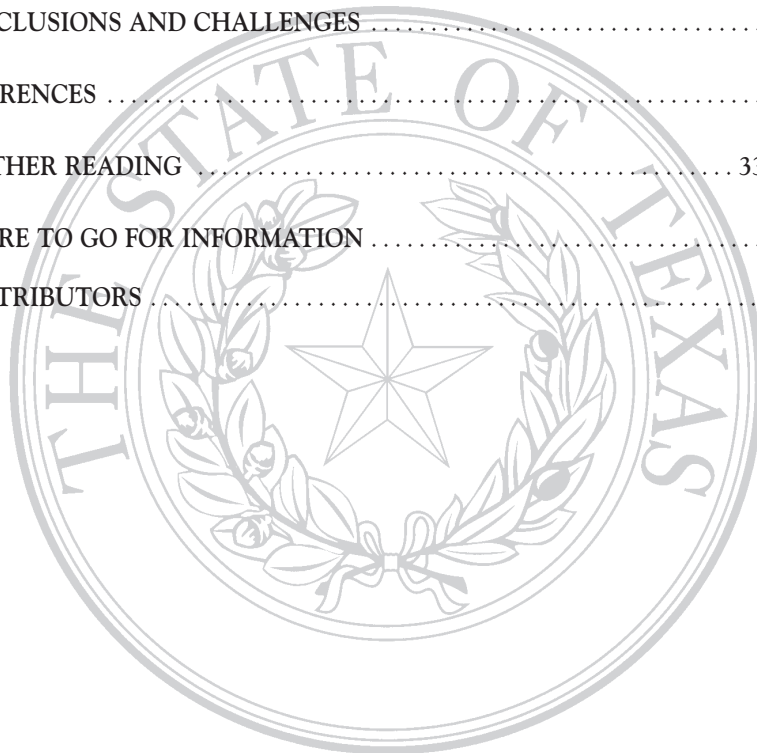


A Guide for Starting a Nature Tourism Business in the Lone Star State

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION	3
OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES	4 – 6
WHAT IS A NATURE TOURIST?	7
GUIDANCE FOR NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS	8 – 9
GUIDANCE FOR A QUALITY NATURE TOURISM INDUSTRY	10 – 11
GUIDANCE FOR TOUR GUIDES AND NATURE TRAVELERS	12 – 13
PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE	14 – 23
MARKETING	24 – 28
OPERATIONS	29
JUST BASIC MANAGEMENT	30
CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES	31
REFERENCES	32
FURTHER READING	33 – 34
WHERE TO GO FOR INFORMATION	35
CONTRIBUTORS	36



INTRODUCTION



“**W**ould you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?” said Alice... ‘That depends a good deal on where you want to go,’ said the Cat... ‘I don’t much care where,’ said Alice... ‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat.’”¹

Unlike the Alice of Lewis Carroll’s imagination, persons who want to start a nature tourism business need a pathway that is clearly defined, or they could lose valuable time, investment capital and natural resources. Providing that pathway is the purpose of this guidebook.

Nature tourism was defined by the Texas Nature Tourism Task Force as “discretionary travel to natural areas that conserves the environmental, social and cultural values while generating an economic benefit to the local community.”² Nature tourists are travelers who spend their time and money enjoying and appreciating a broad range of outdoor activities.

The Texas Nature Tourism Task Force reported that Texas is internationally known as a destination for nature tourists. Throngs of hunters, anglers, campers, birdwatchers and other outdoor enthusiasts travel to Texas every year in pursuit of their favorite outdoor activity. Texas is

preeminent among all states in valuable wetlands and as a result is the premier birdwatching destination in the U.S., according to results of an American Birding Association survey in 1993.³

Travel spending by all domestic and international visitors in Texas reached \$40.4 billion in 2000. This represents a 10.5 percent increase over 1999.⁴ An important component of this burgeoning trade is nature tourism, itself one of the fastest growing segments of a global travel industry. This increasing interest in nature tourism offers new economic opportunities for private landowners, cities, rural communities, Chambers of Commerce, non-profit organizations and others who wish to make tourism their business.

This guide is intended to provide a user-friendly and readable resource for persons interested in starting successful nature tourism businesses that are sensitive to the natural resources on which a nature business depends.

Persons who want to start a nature tourism business need a pathway that is clearly defined, or they could lose valuable time, investment capital and natural resources.



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

OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES



The potential for nature tourism in our state is immeasurable. Texas is blessed with a diversity of wildlife habitats represented by deserts, bayous, forests, grasslands, mountains and canyons, rare species of birds and other animals... many found nowhere else in the United States.

Texans, like all Americans, are turning more and more to outdoor recreation 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 and more people photograph wildlife than play golf, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association.

The Great Texas Wildlife Trails lead people to the best places to enjoy abundant wildlife.

In 2000, Texas' share of the domestic travel spending was over six percent. Spending by visitors to Texas accounts for 3.7 percent of the Texas economy. The tourism industry is, for some areas of Texas, the most important source of economic development.⁴

Already established as a major economic force in Texas, tourism in 2000 directly supported 485,000 jobs with earnings of \$11.2 billion. In tax dollars alone, tourism generated \$676 million in local tax revenues (excluding real estate taxes) and \$2.2 billion in state tax revenues, increases of 99 and 95 percent, respectively, over 1990.⁴

In 2001, an estimated \$7.8 billion was spent on fishing, hunting and wildlife-associated recreation in Texas.⁵

About 6,000 birdwatchers visited 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. The total economic impact was estimated at between \$4 million and \$6 million in a two-month period. The coastal woodland area less than an hour's drive from downtown Houston is known internationally as a premier birding site.⁷

According to 1999 survey data, birdwatching visitors to Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge spent an estimated \$36.5 million on lodging, meals, gas and other purchases.⁸

Between 75,000 and 100,000 tourists visit Aransas National Wildlife Refuge 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.

According to the Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce, birding tours operating out of Rockport/Fulton harbor 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 \$33 a head, the tours generate significant income for the area.

More than 10 years ago, Rockport inaugurated its first Hummer/Bird Celebration in honor of the hummingbirds that migrate through the area. Today, the festival attracts more than 5,000 visitors, who spend \$1 million over the 4-day event, according to the Chamber of Commerce.

The 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows that 31 percent of

OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES



Americans 16 years and older say they observe, feed or photograph wildlife. In addition, 3.2 million people watch wildlife in Texas and over 1 million travel to engage in these activities.⁵

According to the 2000 National Survey of Recreation and the Environment, an estimated 94.1 million people took the time to view wildlife or wildflowers, while 69.4 million people watched birds.⁶

More information on the economic impact of nature based tourism in Texas is available on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Web site www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/tourism or by contacting Linda Campbell, Nature Tourism Coordinator at (512) 389-4396 or linda.campbell@tpwd.state.tx.us.

Landowners, business people and communities interested in developing nature based tourism can participate in the Great Texas Wildlife Trails. These driving trails have been developed to help birders and other wildlife enthusiasts find the best spots in the state to enjoy the outdoor bounty Texas has to offer. Private citizens, land managers, conservation groups, businesses, government agencies and communities are working together to build a network of trails leading people to the best places in the state to enjoy beautiful scenery and abundant wildlife. Texas is known for great birding and wildlife watching opportunities, and Texans are known for their hospitality. Along the trails, travelers interested in nature, history and culture find lots to do, and local communities are there to provide plenty of Texas hospitality.



Birdwatching on the Upper Texas Coast. Photo TPWD

OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESS STORIES



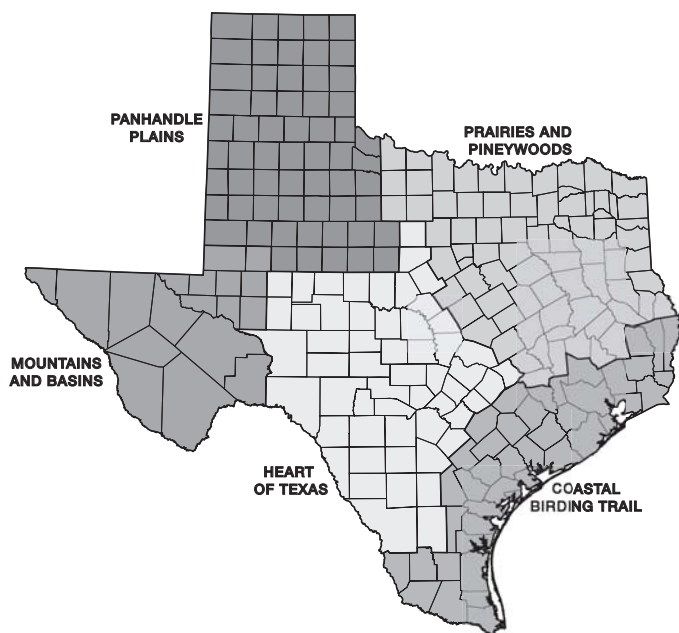
Texas was the first state in the nation to build wildlife viewing driving trails that provide economic incentives for landowners and communities to conserve habitats while providing recreational opportunities for the traveling public. The wildlife trails of Texas promote sustainable economic development, build public support for conservation of wildlife and habitats, and provide a marketing platform for a growing nature-based tourism industry.

Texas is one of the nation's leaders in nature tourism. In 2000, we completed The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, which links 308 premiere birdwatching sites and many communities along the Gulf Coast. To date, TPWD and our partners have distributed nearly 400,000 birding trail maps to interested citizens and

visitors. Texas was the first state to create a birding trail, an idea that has been copied in at least 10 states so far. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is presently working on three new trails modeled after the Coastal Birding Trail. The Heart of Texas and Panhandle Plains Wildlife trails are scheduled for completion in early 2003. The recently-funded Prairies and Pineywoods Trail will be completed by 2004. The wildlife trails are immensely popular because they cater to the specific needs and interests of nature tourists, providing them the information they need to explore the back roads of Texas.

Ultimately, nature tourism leads to conservation by encouraging landowners and communities to conserve habitats, providing wildlife viewers greater opportunity and inviting people to experience for themselves the abundant natural resources of Texas. The wildlife trails encourage people to engage in the enjoyment of nature, thereby gaining greater appreciation and understanding of the importance of conserving wildlife and their habitats for present and future generations. For more information visit the TPWD Web site at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/birdingtrails

Great Texas Wildlife Trails



WHAT IS A NATURE TOURIST?



What are nature tourists? According to Ted Eubanks of Fermata, Inc., “nature tourists are mostly from the city and are tired of stress and traffic and just want to get away.” A variety of studies presents a picture of the nature tourist: Nature tourists involved in wildlife appreciation are almost evenly divided between men and women.

Using average values reported in a 1999 survey of visitors to The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, we see that the typical person traveling the central coast section of the trail was 60 years old, white, college-educated, traveling with a spouse or friend, still working, earning more than \$60,000 a year (household income), with more than 17 years of formal education. The typical visitor had 2.07 people at home and was an active birder and wildlife watcher with over 20 years experience.⁹

A 1992 Clemson University survey of nature tourists showed:

- At least six dimensions of nature-based tourists exist:
 1. Education and history travelers
 2. Social travelers
 3. Relaxation travelers
 4. Nature travelers
 5. Economic and weekend travelers
 6. Camping travelers
- Nature tourists want to be involved in the tourism experience. They're not just passive observers.
- Nature tourists are attracted to mountains and oceansides, wilderness and undisturbed areas, birds, trees and wildflowers, lakes and streams, wildlife, parks and rural areas.

Texas Department of Economic Development in 1994 surveyed non-Texans, asking them 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 activities that scored high are state parks, lakes and boating, fresh and saltwater fishing, campgrounds and hiking trails.

A number studies from Nebraska to Texas have shown that the top motivators of nature travelers are related to the outdoor recreational experience; i.e., to be outdoors and to enjoy the sights, smells and sounds of nature.



Texas Horned Lizard. Photo TPWD

FOUR REASONS NATURE TOURISTS TRAVEL

- To Experience Natural Phenomena
- To Learn About Nature
- To Be Physically Active
- To Meet People with Similar Interests

Source: Clemson University survey of nature tourists, 1992.

GUIDANCE FOR NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS



Because the resources of our state can be impacted by overuse, it is important for natural and cultural resource managers and community leaders to plan activities for a sustainable use.

Effective community planning often involves a coordinated effort on the part of community leaders, elected officials, business people and private and public land owners and managers. This group works together to develop an overall vision and strategy for making nature-based tourism an important part of the local economy. Community planning involves identifying nature and cultural tourism opportunities, infrastructure assets and needs, and developing an action plan to achieve the desired goals of the community. In a state such as Texas where 94% of the land is privately owned, the involvement and support of private landowners is key to achieving a strong nature-based tourism industry.

A basic understanding is needed of the kinds and intensity of activities the resources can accommodate. The areas to be considered should include:

- Assessing the impact of nature-based tourism on the resource, the land owners and managers, the community and the tourism industry.
 - How many visitors and use types can a resource accommodate without adverse impact? How will that impact be measured?
 - How will conflicting uses of resources be planned for and managed?
- How can managers encourage and secure community involvement?
- How do resource managers bring resource users (individuals, user groups and tourism businesses) into the planning and management process?

Assess the impact of nature-based tourism on the resource, the landowners and managers, the community and the tourism industry . . . then assess the current tourism situation and potential.

- Assessing the current tourism situation and potential.
 - What is the current level of visitation?
 - Is that level causing an adverse impact on the resource?
 - What is the attitude of the surrounding community toward the resource/visitation?
 - Are there problems associated with the current level of resource use?
 - What are the physical assets and liabilities of the resource?

Inventory existing infrastructure and decide what may be needed to accommodate present and future visitation.

Decide, from a balanced perspective, which kinds and intensities of nature tourism activity are appropriate for the resource.

GUIDANCE FOR NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS



Central Texas Coast. Photo TPWD

Evaluate community tourism plans (if any exist), and then strive to determine needs of nature tourism operators for potential businesses in the resource region. Look for common ground.

From these activities consider creating a regional nature-based tourism development plan.

Consider regional cooperative marketing opportunities.

Institute regular natural resource impact assessments and revise management strategy to achieve goals for careful resource use and protection.

Consider creating a process for evaluating and reinventing the nature tourism plan, including bringing fresh and future ideas and suggestions for careful resource use and conservation.

Consider creating a regional community-based nature tourism development plan.

* Adapted from guidelines developed by Clemson University in a cooperative project with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

GUIDANCE FOR A QUALITY NATURE TOURISM INDUSTRY



Nature-based tourism businesses should try to work closely with local community leaders and resource managers to plan for nature travel experiences compatible with community and resource management goals. Tourism should **CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY** to local communities and resources.

Businesses should commit to excellence in nature-based tourism quality. By adopting or reaffirming an environmental stewardship ethic for the business, owners will meet the expectations of their customers. Studies of nature tourists in Texas confirm that these travelers care about the environment and support a number of conservation organizations. Businesses should focus on the importance of conserving both natural and cultural resources and enabling a greater harmony between human activities and nature. Some examples:

- Practice “green” purchasing. For example, favor vendors who offer recycled or recyclable products and minimal packaging.
- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle... and strive to “leave no trace.”
- Train your staff to lead by example. Be good environmental stewards and guide your customers toward low impact behaviors which contribute to resource conservation.
- Employ qualified and capable leaders for guided, interpretive programs. Knowing how to tell your story well is important. Nature tourists are well educated and they want to learn by being immersed in a natural or cultural experience. Knowing and interpreting your resources in clear, interesting and relevant ways will add to the satisfaction of the experience you offer.
- Contribute to the local economy by hiring people from the local area and “doing-business” with local businesses.



Canoeing in the Trans-Pecos. Photo TPWD

GUIDANCE FOR A QUALITY NATURE TOURISM INDUSTRY



- Provide your staff with opportunities for training to upgrade their interpersonal, communications, interpretative and other professional skills.
- Be actively involved in and contribute time, energy and resources to local, regional and statewide conservation efforts.

Knowing and interpreting your resources in clear, interesting and relevant ways will add to the satisfaction of the experience you offer.

- Provide and patronize environmentally sensitive accommodations which, for example:
 - Employ energy and water saving devices;
 - Provide interpretative information on local plants, animals, historic and other natural and cultural features; and
 - Maintain grounds using environmentally-friendly plant and pest management practices.
- Work cooperatively with other nature-based tourism businesses in the area to ensure the sustainability of natural and cultural resources.
- Prepare visitors for nature experiences by providing them with information and educational materials about the environment, natural history and cultural characteristics of their destination and its people, so that when they leave nature tourists will have a greater understanding and awareness of the places, people and environments they visit.
- Make sure your customers understand and obey all rules and regulations established by landowners and local resource managers. Manage tour groups in a manner consistent with environmental conditions.

For example, a single guide is probably adequate for a group of 40 on a tour bus, but would be inadequate for the same group on a canoe trip in a sensitive area or under dangerous conditions.

- Travel in small groups to avoid adverse impact on the environment. Nature tour operators should carefully match activities with appropriate resources. Sensitive areas, for example, should be used by small groups or individuals for low intensity, low impact activities. Spread tour activity over a wide area to avoid adverse environmental impact, maintain the quality of the experience for the visitor and distribute the economic benefits of tourism throughout the region.
- Enable a process of monitoring environmental impacts of nature tourists and communicate problems to appropriate resource managers.
- Instill in visitors a sense of personal responsibility for the environment by creating visitor experiences that preserve the hospitality of Texas and encourage respect of traditions, customs and local regulations.

*Adapted from guidelines developed by Clemson University in a cooperative project with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Birdwatching in the Pineywoods. Photo TPWD

GUIDANCE FOR TOUR GUIDES AND NATURE TRAVELERS



Texas offers the traveler a diverse menu of nature-based tourism opportunities from the mountains to the sea. *A Texas Guide to Wildlife Watching* (TPWD publication, PWD BR W7000-659, 9/01) provides guidance on how to observe animals in action, minimize the effects of your presence and take candid, authentic photos.

The following are some guidelines for tour guides and nature travelers in Texas which will enable visitors to enjoy and conserve these irreplaceable resources:

Plan ahead and prepare

- Know and obey the rules and regulations of the area you are visiting.
- Equip and clothe yourself appropriately for the activity you are planning.
- Be prepared for all kinds of weather. Take and use sunscreen and insect repellent. Wear a hat that will protect your face from the sun.

CAMPING ETHICS

Respect all living things

- Know and obey all local wildlife regulations.
- Many animals can be dangerous during breeding season or when raising their young.
- Don't walk on, pick or otherwise disturb beach and dune plants, especially sea oats.
- Do not pick or cut plants.

Minimize the use and impact of fire

- Know and obey fire use regulations.
- Be aware of weather conditions.
- Gather only downed wood, wrist size or smaller, for fires.
- Burn wood to fine ashes.
- When you are ready to leave scatter unused wood.
- In high use areas, use only existing fire rings or designated cooking facilities/areas.



Texas Gulf Coast. Photo TPWD

GUIDANCE FOR TOUR GUIDES AND NATURE TRAVELERS

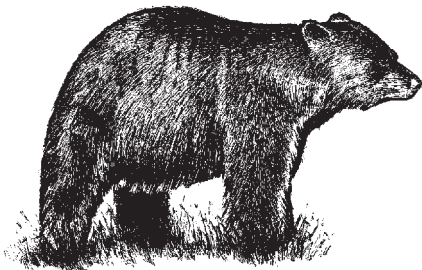


Stay safe in the outdoors

- Alcohol impairs judgment. If you drink, be a careful and responsible drinker.
- Hang food high so animals will not be tempted.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Take a first aid and CPR course. Carry a first-aid kit and a compass. Know how to use them.
- Be careful with matches and cigarette embers.
- File a trip/float plan. Let someone know where you'll be and when you'll return.
- Don't climb up, unless you know you can climb down.
- Always wear an approved personal flotation device when on the water.
- Use the "buddy system," don't participate in "never before tried" activities alone.
- Take a course from recreational professionals before trying difficult and dangerous activities on your own.

Camp and travel on durable surfaces

- In areas of intensive visitor activity, use established trails, camp sites, boat landings, etc.
- In remote or wilderness areas, reduce impacts by spreading out use: avoid creating trails; camp only one or two nights at any single location, and steer clear of areas where impact is just beginning to be visible.



IN THE WILDERNESS

Pack it in, pack it out

- Take a minimum of disposable items with you.
- Remove excess packaging from food and other items before you leave home.
- Do not bury or burn refuse, carry it out.
- If you smoke, save your cigarette butts and take them home.
- If waste receptacles are available, use them.

Properly dispose of what you can't pack out

- Bury human waste in holes 6"-8" deep, away from streams and waterways.
- Scatter all cooking waste and dirty water well away from water sources and camp sites.
- Dispose of hunting waste in an unobtrusive manner.

Leave what you find

- Minimize site alterations. Don't trench around tents. Don't build structures, such as benches, lean-tos, etc.
- Clean-up after yourself. Make the area you leave look as if no one has been there.
- Do not damage trees or alter habitat.
- Do not collect shells, wood, bone, horn, artifacts or other natural and man-made objects. Stop, handle and enjoy them, then leave them for others to observe and enjoy.

*Adapted from guidelines developed by Clemson University in a cooperative project with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



Many have dreamed of owning a tourism business. In order to turn dreams into reality, it is vital to realize that most small businesses require careful analysis of both the business and the resources available. Developing a well-organized business plan is the first step.

Although you might have just had a life changing experience as a member of a guided wilderness tour, backpacking expedition, or deep sea fishing trip, you and your family may or may not be good matches for the knowledgeable, gracious and thoughtful hosts that are required for a successful nature experience. Providing a quality experience is the key!

DIVERSIFYING FARM AND RANCH INCOME THROUGH NATURE TOURISM — AN OVERVIEW

There is a growing interest among agricultural producers in diversifying farm and ranch income by providing wildlife-associated recreational opportunities. Many ranches in Texas already derive substantial income from hunting. Opportunities exist for attracting other segments of the recreation market, such as birders, wildlife

watchers, hikers, mountain bikers or nature photographers, the so-called nature tourism business.

For example, ranchers with established hunting businesses might consider marketing non-consumptive activities such as birding or biking during the non-hunting season. This can fill empty lodging facilities and bring in off-season income. Opportunities also exist for landowners and entrepreneurs interested in developing tourism-related businesses such as B&B's that specialize in birding and wildlife watching.

Hunting outfitters are an established part of wildlife-associated recreation in Texas. With the growing interest in diversification among landowners, opportunities abound for the "new breed of outfitter" specializing in interpreting the natural and cultural resources of Texas for wildlife watchers, birders, photographers and those interested in history and culture.

Although opportunities exist to profit from the growing demand for outdoor recreation, it is important to be realistic about your assets, management ability, personal style and preferences, and how new endeavors integrate into your existing business. Nature tourism is not a cure-all to "save the ranch." It can diversify income, but those in the business will tell you that it takes commitment and vision. It is not for everyone.



Photo TPWD

Focus on providing an enjoyable experience that also teaches.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



Providing recreational opportunities is a people-oriented business. It's not a business for you if you don't enjoy dealing with people and providing services to your customers. The ability to enjoy the company of others, to share your experiences and knowledge with those of different backgrounds and to be flexible enough to adjust to people with personalities and tastes different from your own are important attributes for success in a "people business" such as nature tourism.

In developing a nature-based tourism enterprise, the first step is to inventory the natural and cultural resources that form the basis of what you are selling. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What does your ranch have that is unique or different from others? (Think about plants, animals, geology, local history and ranching heritage.)
2. What are your ranch's special habitats and how can you provide viewing opportunities? (Think about watering areas, wildlife gardens close to lodging, feeders, blinds, elevated observation areas, trails and boardwalks.)
3. Get outside perspective-remember the common or ordinary to you may be of great interest to urban residents or visitors from other states and countries.

Nature tourists are looking for the natural, historical and cultural heart of the place they are visiting, and their defining principle is authenticity. They are interested in what is real, and they want to be immersed in a rich natural, cultural or historical experience. Focus on providing an enjoyable experience that also teaches. Good interpretation of the resources adds immensely to the learning experience and overall enjoyment. A satisfying experience that meets visitor expectations will generate repeat customers and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Once you have an adequate assessment of your natural and cultural resources, think about what activities you could offer that best fit with your current operation and interests. Start slow and focus on what you can do best based on your resource assessment and financial resources. Consider the preferences and abilities of other family members and employees. Be honest with yourself about your temperament, time, management ability and preferences for certain type of activities and people. Examples of activities offered on Texas ranches include:

- Guided bird and wildflower walks
- Special viewing areas for hummingbirds
- Wildlife watching from blinds (turkey, deer, birds)
- "Owl prowls" at night
- Stargazing in dark, rural settings, sometimes with telescopes
- Special hikes to unique or scenic areas
- Birdwatching or wildlife viewing by canoe or kayak
- Fossil walks along creek beds
- Interpretive walks featuring geology, historic sites, ranching heritage
- Mountain bike trails
- Horseback riding trails
- Camping and backpacking
- Chuck-wagon meals with music or storytelling
- Observing or participating in working livestock
- Just relaxing and experiencing a rural setting with family or friends

For many agricultural landowners, marketing nature-tourism activities is the most difficult part of starting a new business. It often is easier for people of the land to understand the resources themselves than how to sell the

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



experiences of those resources to others. Marketing is vitally important, however, as the time and energy invested in researching and developing a business endeavor is wasted if potential customers are not aware of its existence. Although a full discussion of marketing is beyond the scope of this guide, here are some of the most important principles:

First, identify the market segment that you want to attract. Segmentation allows businesses to divide a homogenous market into smaller groups, see the diversity among customers and concentrate on pleasing a segment that might find their product or service attractive.

One of the most valuable things you can do in developing your business is to visit an existing business that has a product or market segment similar to the one you are considering. If you want to attract birders, visit an enterprise that offers birdwatching experiences or targets a particular segment of the birding market. Searching the Internet for birding-related websites provides contact information, as well as information on activities and pricing.

Networking with others involved in the tourism industry provides valuable information and contacts. In order to meet potential customers and make contact with others offering nature-based tourism opportunities, attend some birding and nature festivals. Develop a close relationship with your nearest Chamber of Commerce or CVB if you want to establish your business as a destination for travelers to your area.

Encourage partnerships between two or more businesses so that everyone benefits. Partnering allows small businesses to pool talent and resources to create a product that is more attractive than any one business can provide on its

own. Tour packages are a good example. Cooperating with other landowners, lodging facilities and restaurants in your area attracts more visitors to your destination and encourages them to stay longer and spend more money.

Texans are blessed with an abundance of wildlife and natural beauty, and opportunities abound for sharing this natural heritage with fellow Texans and visitors from all over the world. For some landowners, diversifying agricultural income through nature-based tourism can be both enjoyable and profitable. For more information, contact Linda Campbell, Nature Tourism Coordinator, Wildlife Diversity Branch (512) 389-4396 or linda.campbell@tpwd.state.tx.us

SHOULD YOU START A NATURE TOURISM BUSINESS?

Check yourself out. Before beginning the pursuit of a tourism enterprise, you should ask yourself:

- Do I like meeting and working with all types of people?
- Do I like to entertain and serve strangers?
- Am I knowledgeable about the natural resources I have to work with?
- Am I willing to work long hours and in difficult environments and circumstances?
- Do I have outdoor skills?
- Am I patient, persistent and sensitive to the needs of the nature traveler... and do I have the physical stamina and vigor to serve them properly?
- Am I proud of my resources and do I have the desire to share my knowledge and experiences with others?
- Can I manage my enterprise and sustain/protect the natural resource upon which my enterprise depends?

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



**Most small businesses require careful analysis . . .
and require a well-organized business plan.**

Are you:

1. A self starter?
2. Willing to take responsibility?
3. Organized?
4. Able to make decisions and carry them out?
5. Able to solve problems?
6. Independent/self confident and positive?
7. Energetic and persistent?

Do you have experience in:

1. Budgeting?
2. Planning?
3. Directing?
4. Presenting? Selling?
5. Communicating?
6. Keeping financial records?

Your commitment:

1. What priorities do you have in your life now?
2. How much time do these take?
3. How many hours per week will you devote to your business?

Your contacts:

1. Who do you know and who do you need to know?
2. Who are you first going to talk to about your business?

3. Who do you know that can help you?
 - a. An attorney
 - b. An accountant
 - c. A banker
 - d. Others in a related business
 - e. A member of the family or friend

If your response to most of the above questions is supportive and a positive YES!, you might prove to be a successful owner-operator of a nature-based business. But remember, small businesses have a high rate of failure. Only one out of ten small businesses continues to operate after five years. Be sure to develop vital financial and business management skills. Planning, patience and persistence are key components for sustaining a nature business.

MEET EXPERIENCED NATURE ENTERPRISE PRACTITIONERS

One of the first things you should do is seek out and analyze those who are operating nature enterprises. Visit enterprises similar to your interests. A good way to analyze a nature tourism product is to experience one. Book yourself with a successful business similar to what you are interested in developing and see what it does. Obtain as much insight into similar small businesses as possible. For instance:

- Talk to as many owners as you can about their operations and your plans. Don't be afraid to ask simple as well as complex questions. It is far more effective and less costly to learn from the experiences of others.
- If possible, consider volunteering or working for a nature-based business for a season.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



- Take advantage of educational programs, information and technical assistance available through trade associations, state and federal agencies (Small Business Administration, IRS, TPWD), university extension programs, chambers of commerce, small business development centers, convention and visitors bureaus, private sector businesses and local institutions, particularly those programs that might pertain to the environment, wildlife management, outdoor skills development, interpretation/guide training, equipment maintenance and small business development. (See “Where to Go For Additional Information” and “Further Reading.”)
- Study available books, pamphlets and articles to develop further your understanding of local ecology, land management practices, business opportunities and wildlife regulations.
- What services and facilities are available (i.e., lodging, food service, packaged tours, state parks, etc.)?
- Where do the tourists come from now and what major cities are close by (i.e. identify your source of potential customers)?
- What group of tourists is currently visiting your area? And what do they do?
- What are your personal resources (financial, equipment, etc.)?
- What are your skills and those of other family members in relation to desired customer experiences?

It is far more effective and less costly to learn from the experiences of others.

EIGHT STEPS TOWARD STARTING A NATURE TOURISM BUSINESS

STEP 1 — Assessment

Before going any further, ask yourself, where am I now and where do I want to be? You must consider how the business can contribute to your goals for yourself and your family... and analyze your current ability and situation.

- What natural, environmental or nature-based resources are present that will entice people to stop and visit (i.e., trails, scenic vistas, birds and other wildlife, clean rivers and streams, wildflowers, geology, history, etc.)?
- What type of experience can and should I be providing?
- What is the image of the operation/equipment (example, luxury or rustic, i.e., high end B&B/lodge or comfortable cabin)?
- Is the proposed business site appropriate?
 - a. Is it adequate for the customer?
 - b. Is it in the proper location in relation to access for the customer’s desired experience?
- How will out-of-state or long-distance travelers find out about and gain access to your business and what will the total experience be like for them? (i.e. consider airports, rental cars, shuttle services, etc.) Lay out the total experience in your mind from the first phone call (and the message and voice on the other end of the phone) to the parting “farewell” and “come back.” This analysis will include how to make

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



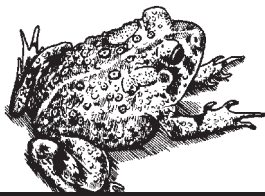
a reservation for services and products, where are the major airports and how will they get to my place, what will I do to offer them meaningful experiences during their time here, and perhaps most important, how will I plan time for their rest and reflection... and what memories and souvenirs will they take back. It is important to return them with lots of good memories.

STEP 3 — Service concept

In defining your service concept remember to ask: What product or goods and services will the customer be buying? What are the benefits they seek? In your case, is it the convenience of a guided nature experience? Your skills? Your knowledge? Your assistance? Although they may first recognize your advertising, the facility, you or your guide, they are SEEKING BENEFITS. They are seeking a quality experience that includes important NATURE BENEFITS such as adventure, friendship, excitement and a connection and understanding of their natural surroundings. Be sure to put your service concept down on paper... and ask yourself:

- What will make my business concept different and better than the competition?
- How will my business best serve my customers?
- Does my concept have the potential to be successful?
- How can I nurture and grow the business?

...And BE CREATIVE!!



What product or goods and services will the customer be buying? And what are the benefits that they seek?

STEP 4 — Business plan

The single most important action in your enterprise is the business plan. Do a formal written business plan that you can take to a banker. Many business dreams with great potential fail because they were not logically planned. A business plan is the framework upon which you plan to develop your business. In your business plan you must address several key questions:

- Definition of the business - What are you doing?
- Definition of the products/services - What are you selling?
- Objectives and goals (personal and business) - How much do you want to sell?
- Definition of the market - To whom will you sell? How will you market your business? Who is your competition? Who are your partners?
- Management structure - How will you run your business?
- Financial analysis/break even analysis - Where will you get required capital? Where will you get necessary equipment? How long will it take before you make a profit?

There are many formats to follow in writing a business plan, including some computer programs that will simplify the writing task.

A business plan helps you focus and organize on paper the reasons why you are in business, what your market is, what your strengths and weaknesses are, what your financial projections are like and what your management environment is. The plan will help you make insightful business decisions and inform potential lenders about your business. Seek help from small business develop-

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



ment practitioners. The network of Small Business Development Centers across Texas as well as SCORE (Senior Corps of Retired Executives) chapters can provide you with business plan assistance. (See: “Further Reading” for business plan guidance.)

One excellent resource is the publication entitled *Building An Agribusiness or Small Business Plan* produced by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDAM537, 9/00). This publication includes helpful business plan and finance worksheets. It is available free from TDA by calling (877) 428-7848 or through the TDA Web site at www.agr.state.tx.us (rural economic development, publication links).

The Texas Agricultural Finance Authority, a public authority within the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), offers several financial assistance programs that work through eligible lending institutions. The programs can be reviewed at http://www.agr.state.tx.us/eco/finance_ag_development.

Specifically, the following programs offer assistance for rural economic development projects:

- Agricultural Financial Assistance Program
- Linked Deposit Program
- Rural Development Finance Program

For more information and applications for the various financial assistance programs, go to the TDA Web site or call (877) 428-7848 or (512) 475-1619.

STEP 5 — Identify expenses

Whether you are beginning a new business or diversifying an existing business, you will face start-up costs and operating expenses. These should be considered carefully and included in your financial analysis.

1. **Start-up costs.** A basic first step in determining your start-up cost is to make a list of all the expenses that you can anticipate incurring before you can open your door to clientele. Review your cost list with knowledgeable operators in the tourism industry and be sure to consult your accountant, banker or financial backer.
2. **Operating expenses.** Operating expenses will begin before you open your business (for example, marketing and advertising will be necessary before the grand opening). Expenses will vary seasonally and will be greatly influenced by the number and diversity of clientele. Examples of expenses may include:
 - Food and beverages
 - Gasoline
 - Equipment and maintenance
 - Repairs
 - Utilities
 - Rent
 - Telephone

COMPONENTS FOUND IN MOST BUSINESS PLANS

- Executive Summary
- The Business
- Product/Service Description
- Market Research/Analysis
- The Marketing Plan
- Operations
- Financial Data
- Investment Required
- Appendices

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



- Permits
- Salaries, wages and employee benefits
- Marketing and advertising
- Insurance
- Legal and accounting fees

STEP 6 — Insurance

Discuss insurance needs with people currently in a related business and with insurance professionals and financial planners to determine needs for your type of business. Do comparative shopping and be sure you have sufficient protection and coverage. Insurance should cover:

- Liability (business and personal)
- Medical
- Personal liability for assistants
- Client medical coverage
- Property coverage
 - Building/Contents
 - Equipment (trucks, boats, electronics, etc.)
- Loss of Income

In 1995, the Texas Legislature offered landowners limited liability protection by adding Chapter 75 to the Texas Civil Practices and Remedies Code. The statute altered common law rules that placed all visitors on land in one of four legal classifications. A landowner's responsibility for the safety of visitors to their property varies depending on a visitor's legal classification. The four categories, which start from the highest degree of care owed to each group are:

1. Invitee
2. Licensee
3. Trespasser
4. Child under the attractive nuisance doctrine

In its current amended form, Chapter 75 classifies recreational guests on agricultural land as "trespassers" if there is no entry charge or if annual charges for entry during the current year do not exceed four times the property taxes on the agricultural land during the preceding year. For example, if a landowner pays \$1,000 a year in property taxes, but only charges \$3,500 annually in recreational fees, the landowner's liability is limited under Chapter 75.

Landowners are not totally absolved of liability even though recreational guests are viewed as trespassers under the statute. Landowners must refrain from willfully or wantonly injuring recreational guests. Likewise, landowners remain liable if the recreational guests are injured through gross negligence or acts conducted with malicious intent or in bad faith.

For those charging recreational guests more than four times their agricultural property taxes, landowners do not owe recreational guests a greater duty than that owed to trespassers if they maintain the following minimum amounts of liability insurance on their property:

1. \$500,000 for each person; and
2. \$1 million for each single occurrence of bodily injury or death; and
3. \$100,000 for each single occurrence for injury to or destruction of property.

Landowners who charge their recreational guests less than four times their property taxes may still want to consider buying the minimum amount of liability insurance, if it is economically feasible, to benefit from legal representation provided by an insurance company in case of a lawsuit.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



Consider including statements of liability on your printed materials or contracts but be sure to have them reviewed by an attorney first. For more information on liability protection for landowners involved in wildlife-related recreation, consult the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University at <http://recenter.tamu.edu/pubs>.

STEP 7 — Taxes

Taxes for small businesses are somewhat more complicated than for regular wage-earners. The form of business organization you choose (sole proprietor, partnership or corporation) affects your tax reporting requirements.

Consideration should be given to:

- Self-employment Tax
- Social Security Tax
- Employer Identification Number
- Sales Tax
- Franchise Tax
- Income Tax
- Unemployment Tax

When developing your business be sure to consult a professional accountant familiar with small businesses to help you understand your legal obligations and to develop a tax plan that best suits your operation. The Internal Revenue Service offers frequent workshops for new business owners on taxes and record-keeping requirements. Be sure to check with the Small Business Administration. Specifically, consider obtaining the following publications:

From the Small Business Administration:

- Starting Your Business – www.sba.gov/starting
- U.S. Business Advisor – www.business.gov

From the Texas Agricultural Extension Service:

- So You Want To Start a Home-Based Business in Texas! (B-1634)
- <http://www.tcebookstore.org>

From the IRS (www.irs.gov/forms_pubs/pubs):

- Starting a Business and Keeping Records (Publication 583)
- Business Use of Your Home (Publication 587)
- Self Employment Tax (Publication 533)
- Small Business and Self-Employed Taxpayer (Publication 3698)
- Small Business Talk (Publication 1853)
- Small Business Tax Workshop Workbook (Publication 1066)

And if your enterprise is a 501(c)(3) initiative, you should consult IRS publications 557 and 598 or go to IRS Web site at www.irs.gov (Charities and Non-Profits).

STEP 8 — Regulatory requirements

Early in your planning process, review your federal, state and local regulations. Although regulation requirements pertaining to your operations may be local, requirements pertaining to the operations of vehicles (bus, boat) may be both state and federal. Operation in some environmentally sensitive areas might require both federal and state permits.

Of particular importance is safety. In many situations there are specific requirements for communications, first aid, fire protection and personal gear such as life preservers. It is critical that employees are certified in first aid and lifesaving. The Red Cross is an excellent resource. Also, consider consulting with U.S. Coast Guard officials and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department concerning water and boating safety.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A NATURE TOURISM ENTERPRISE



Basic considerations and requirements include the following:

- **Doing Business As/Assumed Name Certificate/ Business Name.** Choose a unique name for your business that will not be confused with anything else. Sole proprietorships or partnerships must file an assumed name certificate with each County Clerk's Office in which they intend to do business. Corporations must file an assumed name certificate with the Texas Secretary of State office that does a title search to verify the name you have selected is not in use by another business. You will receive a Doing Business As (DBA) Certificate. To protect that name statewide, contact: Office of Secretary of State, Sam Houston Office Building, Austin, Texas 78711, (512) 463-5555... and consult with your attorney.
- **State Registration.** The Permit Assistance Center within the Texas Department of Economic Development can help you identify those federal, state and local agencies that regulate your particular business

and from which you will need to obtain permits and registrations. The center will compile and send to you a comprehensive application packet for all your necessary permits. To obtain more information on registering your business, contact: Texas Economic Development, Office of Business Permits Assistance, Austin, Texas 78711, (800) 888-0511.

- **Zoning Laws/Deed Restrictions.** Many cities and towns have zoning restrictions that prohibit or severely limit the type of business you may wish to operate, especially if it is home-based. Check with your local government concerning your zoning rules before you make a large business investment. Contact your town or city hall to check zoning regulations pertaining to operating a business from your home. If you live in a subdivision with deed restrictions, check with the Homeowners Association to make sure a business in your home is permissible. If not, you may be able to petition the officers of the association for approval of your business.



**A good way to analyze a nature
tourism product is to experience one.**

View from the South Rim, Chisos Mountains. Photo TPWD

MARKETING



Marketing is far more than promotion. Marketing is defining your customer's desires/needs and directing your entire business toward meeting these expectations by offering satisfying outdoor experiences.

The most important considerations in marketing are the product/service mix, people market identification, price, partnerships, packaging and promotion.

Consider doing a web search of businesses offering nature tourism opportunities. The range of experiences being offered is as diverse as Texas itself and the imaginations of people. Try several successful nature tourism operations and see what they do from "start to finish."

Following are six steps to take in marketing your business:

STEP 1 — Product design

A product may be a physical object or a service. The product and services that you offer are the mixture of benefits which the customer thinks they will receive. It is not only the accommodations, meals or guide service that you offer; in a nature experience, you are satisfying a need and desire for education, socializing and relaxation. It is necessary to define what your customers are buying from their point of view.

Remember that you are selling an experience, and nature tourists want what is "real." They want to learn and they want an enjoyable natural, cultural or historical experience.

STEP 2 — People — market identification

Good communication with your customers requires that you know to whom you are trying to market. The most basic questions that should always be asked are who, what, when, where and how:

- Who uses this service and who pays for it?
- What additional services are required?
- What are their characteristics (age, interests, etc.)?
- When do they use such a service?
- Where are they located?
- How can you best communicate with them?

Good communication requires that you know to whom you are trying to market.

Market research has shown that price is not the first thing customers consider. First, customers will evaluate the product, the services offered, the perceived quality of the opportunity and their desire for it... then they ask about the price!

Consider, for example, that not all birdwatchers are alike. Some are avid birders interested primarily in seeing new species. Many more people enjoy birds as a part of the overall outdoor experience. The chart on the next page, developed by Ted Eubanks of Fermata, Inc., illustrates market segmentation in nature tourism.

If you want to market to nature tourists, it is important to understand which segment best fits your resources and business plan.

M A R K E T I N G



Nature tourism is essentially a specialized niche market, i.e. clientele with special, unique and clearly defined interest and needs. Further definition or refinement of that niche might be provision of services for disabled persons. Please refer to the TPWD Web site at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/tourism/wheelchair_access for a list of wheelchair accessible wildlife viewing sites in Texas.

STEP 3 — Price

Although your customer looks for a unique experience and good service, inevitably for the owner-operator, pricing is a critical bottom line factor in your marketing plan. One method for pricing is to project what the business cost per customer (this must include start-up and operating cost) will be and then to add the percent of profit desired. This is often called Cost-Based Pricing. Another way to price is Going-Rate Pricing. With this method you simply strive to base your pricing upon the competition. This requires investing your time and money in researching fully experienced tourism operators related to the business that you are considering.

Wise operators will determine the Cost-Based Price and then compare that price to the Going-Rate Price before making a final pricing decision. One should keep in mind that some people may be willing to pay more for special or exclusive services. This could be one way to differentiate your business from a competitor.

Pricing is a critical bottom line factor in your marketing plan.

STEP 4 — Partnership and packaging

Too often we think in terms of our own business concept and ignore the other elements that are necessary for a successful tourism business. Tourists require accommodations, food and beverages, transportation and information. It is almost impossible for a single small business to effectively provide all of the essential elements. Identify additional local experiences that could be packaged with your tour. Consider adding festivals, cowboy poetry, folk heroes, historical lectures and unique and related cultural events. Offer various options for your package where people have choices that range from busy to slow. Some people want to choose.

MARKET SEGMENTATION IN NATURE TOURISM			
<u>HIGHLY SPECIALIZED</u>	<u>MODERATELY SPECIALIZED</u>	<u>WEAKLY SPECIALIZED</u>	<u>NON-SPECIALIZED</u>
Primary Recreationist	Secondary Recreationist	Peripheral Recreationist	Incidental Recreationist
Avitourist	Nature Tourist	Experiential Tourist	General Tourist
Committed Birder	Naturalist	Adventure Traveler	Leisure Traveler
	Wildlife Viewer	Cultural/Historical Traveler	Business Traveler
	General Nature Traveler		

MARKETING



By seeking out and partnering with other businesses in your area that offer complementary products and services, you can effectively offer a quality experience to the visitor. One approach is to reach an agreement with a group of complementary enterprises, offering a package where all facilities and services are covered by a single price and can be purchased in a single transaction. For example, a farm or ranch offering special wildlife viewing or nature tours may enter into an agreement with a local lodge or hotel to provide accommodations.

Identify additional local experiences that could be packaged with what you offer.

Consider partnering with a related nature tourism enterprise. Such associations can be utilized to represent your industry and lower fixed costs like insurance and marketing and are a great opportunity for sharing ideas, ensuring quality and training for improvement of your enterprise.

STEP 5 — Promotion

Few products on the market appeal to everyone. Your financial success depends on your ability to appeal to enough customers to cover your expenses and produce a reasonable profit. Establishing your business requires a certain amount of personal selling. If the public does not know that your business exists, there will be no demand for it. Creating public awareness and demand for your product involves commitment to promotion and advertising. Nature tourism should make conservation part of its marketing concept. Nature tourists want to know that you are contributing to conservation by caring and protecting the resource. Be aware of the importance of brochures, signs and interpretation for promoting your business. Good logos and designs don't have to be expen-

sive – just look good and be creative. Do such things as develop wildlife and plant inventories for your site and region – and think about how you can piggyback with other local marketing areas. Write a story and submit it to a magazine and use that as your marketing piece. Invite travel and feature writers to experience what you have to offer. Do a video to show at trade events. Use radio to spread the word. Look for creative ways to get the media involved in promoting your business “in the name of new!”

Take a picture of your guests having a great time and send them away with a souvenir photo that includes your business name or logo. Be creative and enthusiastic about your business and during every interaction with your customer!

The nature tourist should be made aware of:

- The nature of your service
- Who does business with you
- What activities, experiences and benefits you offer
- Facilities and rates
- Your location

THE FIRST FOUR STEPS IN DEVELOPING ADVERTISING

1. Catch their Attention
2. Get their Interest
3. Create a Desire
4. Get them to Act

Surveys have shown that today's nature tourists are well-educated and most use the Internet to find information on wildlife-related travel destinations. Consider

MARKETING



developing a web page to market your nature-based business. Find ways to link your web site to local and regional sites that can help promote your business. Design your site so that it is picked up by the commonly used search engines.

There are many potential advertising mediums available to you, including television, radio, magazines, newspapers, billboards and direct mail. Each medium has different characteristics to consider. Advertising is costly so it is important that you carefully select the appropriate media. Your choice will depend on many factors: the amount of money available, the message, the market and market area. (Most important: does it reach my market?) Contact your local tourism organizations, chambers of commerce, state tourism office and other promotion organizations. Request information about media sources, technical assistance and potential cooperative advertising opportunities. Look for trade and special interest group magazines (i.e., birding, nature photography, fly fishing, etc.). Remember that providing good service and a memorable experience generates positive “word of mouth” from your customers – and this is often the best way to enlarge your customer base and secure return visits.

STEP 6 — Public relations and personal selling

Building good relations within your community and region is an excellent way to promote your business. Many clients will be referred by people living in your area. Local residents and businesses like to recommend places that are an asset or unique feature of the community. “Good word of mouth” is the single best and most affordable form of advertising! “Bad word of mouth” is simply an unaffordable cost. If the customers believe you are offering a quality service, they will recommend you.

Your promotions program should include the following:

- Make local residents aware that you are offering a nature-based experience.
- Support community programs. Become a member of the chambers of commerce, Better Business Bureau and visitors bureau. Become active in civic and environmental groups.
- Work within existing community, regional and state environmental agencies and groups to help promote the development of nature-based tourism.
- Offer to assist your local tourism agency with familiarization tours that it may be planning in your area for travel writers. Providing a complimentary nature-based service to a travel writer will be a good marketing investment.
- Offer a free tour or weekend stay to a segment of recreation users, for example, birdwatchers. Ask them to evaluate your operation and get their input on pricing and activities.
- Send news releases to area newspapers and radio and television stations and make them aware of current environmental events and activities. Example: such things as the early arrival of a bird species or the catch of a record breaking fish are often newsworthy.
- Participate and survey community events. Keep abreast of activities within the community, and donate your services when appropriate.

Positive “word of mouth” from your customers is often the best way to enlarge your customer base and secure return visits.

MARKETING



(logo examples)

Offer to assist your local tourism agency with familiarization tours that it may be planning in your area for travel writers.

- Send a newsletter, a list of upcoming events and holiday greeting cards to your clientele. Prepare an e-mail listserve to keep your customers and others informed about opportunities you offer.
- Set the appropriate image for your business. Pay attention to:
 - Company name and logo
 - Facility appearance
 - Employee appearance
 - Business cards and forms
 - Equipment appearance
 - Ways you contribute to the conservation of your resource.
- Continually survey your customers/clients to learn more about how you are doing and who they are.



Photo TPWD

OPERATIONS



An important facet of the operations procedure is the development of safety procedures, rules and regulations for your customers. Sufficient resources and time should be allocated to ensure their safety.

DEVELOP AN OPERATIONS PLAN

A nature tourism operator should begin by visualizing and making basic “nuts and bolts” decisions:

- What are the objectives for the major nature activities, and a plan of action for achieving them?
- What detailed activities must be carried out in the operation of the business (make a detailed operations manual)?
- Who will carry out these activities (personnel)?
- How will necessary tasks be defined (job descriptions) and who will provide for employee training?
- What talents are necessary to make your plan operate smoothly to please the customer?
- How will identified weaknesses or constraints be overcome?

DEVELOP AN INTERPRETIVE PLAN

- Learn all you can about your resources.
- Provide good interpreters for your resources. Remember that people like the “personal touch” of family members who can tell the “real” story of the ranch and its resources.

- Tell the story with words, sounds, sights, touch, etc.
- Get your clients involved in the experience. Make it fun and memorable.

A well organized excursion into nature begins with an educational session covering safety requirements.

Customers should also be made aware of the need for conservation and management.

Gather together a group of your friends and role play an enterprise activity to see if your plan works... strive to do it for real so that you can evaluate and find your flaws. Be sure after the start up of your enterprise that you consistently review your enterprise to determine your strengths and weaknesses, and then do what you can to build on your strengths and overcome your weaknesses.



Bighorn sheep. Photo TPWD

J U S T B A S I C M A N A G E M E N T



RESERVATION REQUESTS

Reservation requests for lodging or visits will usually be made by telephone, through the mail or online. Experience has shown that most individuals who call for reservations expect to get through on the first or second attempt and few will continue trying... so try to keep telephone lines open and be sure that your first point of contact is knowledgeable about services and rates and is capable of keeping necessary records and reservations. Forms should be developed to ensure ease of and accurate recording of necessary information.

Once a deposit is received, prepare a confirmation and immediately send it to the guest. Keep a copy for your records. Ensure that the deposit/cancellation/refund policy is stated clearly on this form.



Photo TPWD

If you must have a mechanical device to answer your telephone, have a way for your customer to leave a number so you can call them back, and do so promptly. Let them know on your voice mail when you are returning or when they can expect a call.

TRACKING RESERVATIONS

Enter all reservations in a date book or on a calendar page. Make sure this documentation is readily available to those who are handling telephone requests.

BOOKKEEPING/ACCOUNTING

The best time to set up a record-keeping system is before you start the business. Experience clearly indicates that the use of an adequate record-keeping system increases the chances of business survival. Too often, those entering a business think they must keep records only because it is required by the Internal Revenue Service. However, accurate and complete financial records can help the owner monitor the business and make plans for the future based on financial knowledge rather than guesswork. Contact an accountant who is familiar with home-based business, and develop a simple accounting procedure that will make year-end calculations easy. Consider taking advantage of readily available computerized systems.

CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES



One characteristic of Texans is that we have an extraordinary sense of place. Our lands and waters comprise a rich natural heritage and a diverse resource base which has given rise to a unique identity and pride that form 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.

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 its abundant natural resources. In developing our future economy, however, we need not exhaust our natural treasure in order to profit from it. In fact, the full measure of Texas in this century will only be realized if our vision includes 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.

Texas is once again positioned to realize a new and exciting prosperity from its abundant natural resources.



Texas white-tailed deer. Photo TPWD

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see <http://www.rpts.tamu.edu/tpwd/reports.htm>

Tourism Marketing Match, Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism, Agricultural Extension Service, Andy Skadberg.

WHERE TO GO FOR INFORMATION



Internal Revenue Service, 300 E. 8th St., Austin, TX.

Audubon Texas, 2525 Wallingwood, Suite 301, Austin, TX 78746, (512) 306-0225.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service,
101 South Main, Temple, TX 76501-7682,
(254) 742-9800.

Small Business Development Centers, Dallas/Fort Worth
District Office, 4300 Amon Carter Blvd., Ste. 114,
Fort Worth, TX 76155, (817) 355-1933.

Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Recreation Park
and Tourism Sciences Department, Texas A&M
University, College Station, TX 77843-2261,
(979) 845-5419.

Texas Economic Development, Tourism Division,
P.O. Box 12728, Austin, TX 78711, Sarah Page
(512) 936-0221.

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality,
P.O. Box 13087, Austin, TX 78711-3087,
General Information (512) 239-1000.

Texas Nature Tourism Council, 812 San Antonio St.,
Austin, TX 78701, Paul Serff (512) 476-4472.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Wildlife
Diversity Branch, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin,
TX 78744, Linda Campbell (512) 389-4396.

Texas Travel Industry Association, 812 San Antonio St.,
Austin, TX 78701, (512) 476-4472.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Austin Field Office,
10711 Burnet Road, Ste. 200, Hartland Bank
Building, Austin, TX 78758, (512) 490-0057.

**Prospective operators of nature tourism bed and break-
fasts should contact:**

Texas Hotel Motel Association, 1701 West Ave.,
Austin, TX 78701, (512) 474-2996.

**For information about how to plan a nature festival,
contact:**

Texas Festivals and Events Association,
812 San Antonio St., Austin, TX 78701,
(512) 476-4472.

For RV and Camping Guide Directory, call or write:

Texas Association of Campground Owners,
P.O. Box 14055, Austin, TX 78761, (512) 459-8226.

Internet References:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/tourism>

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/birdingtrails>

Texas A&M University, Department of Recreation,
Parks and Tourism

http://www.rpts.tamu.edu/tce/nature_tourism

Fermata, Inc., Austin, Texas (private nature-based
tourism consulting firm)

<http://www.fermatainc.com>

Texas Department of Economic Development,
Tourism Division

<http://research.travel.state.tx.us>

Texas Nature Tourism Council

www.tourtexas.com/tntc/tntc

Watchable Wildlife, Inc.

www.watchablewildlife.org

C O N T R I B U T O R S



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Thomas D. Potts, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-1005, provided the nature tourism publication entitled *Nature-Based Tourism Enterprises*. His work was adapted and merged with strategic parts of *Nature Tourism in the Lone Star State: Economic Opportunities in Nature*, a special report developed by the State Task Force on Nature Tourism. These two publications, were used in developing the original version of *Making Nature Your Business*. Now in its third revision (December 2002) the original publication has been updated, revised and added to by Linda Campbell, Nature Tourism Coordinator, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Design of *Making Nature Your Business* for web distribution by Creative Services, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Note: *Making Nature Your Business* is a working document, and will be modified and reprinted as needed. Please mail any comments or suggestions to Nature Tourism Coordinator, Wildlife Diversity Branch, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744.



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Austin, Texas 78744

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