

Interim News Briefs



November 2016, Number 84-15

Natural Resources, State Budget

Texas state parks planning updates with dedicated funding

November 28 — Over the next few years, the state park system in Texas will undergo several repairs and renovations made possible by newly dedicated funding. According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), legislation enacted by the 84th Legislature in 2015 to dedicate funding for parks will allow the department to address longstanding maintenance issues, as well as make repairs needed after recent extreme weather.

Under Texas law, 94 percent of the tax revenue generated by the sale or use of sporting goods is allocated to various funds within the department for both local and state parks. Although revenue from this sporting goods sales tax (SGST) is required to be deposited in department accounts for parks, those funds sometimes have been appropriated by the Legislature to other purposes. The 84th Legislature in 2015 enacted [HB 158](#) by Larson, which requires this money to be spent only for its intended purposes. The 84th Legislature also enacted [SB 1366](#) by Kolkhorst, which removed restrictions on how the Legislature may allocate money among the various department accounts.

The current fiscal 2016-17 budget appropriates to the department \$261.1 million, the full 94 percent of the estimated SGST revenue, for state and local parks. According to TPWD, this is an increase of \$129.4 million, or about 98 percent, from fiscal 2014-15 appropriations. Combined with general revenue the department received, the increased SGST funds will allow the department to make improvements across the state parks system.

The department has been appropriated \$81.3 million in combined SGST revenue and general revenue to address long-standing deferred maintenance in state parks, including building system repairs, retrofits, and upgrades not representing an imminent threat that had been postponed to address other priorities. The Joint Oversight Committee on Government Facilities, created by [SB 2004](#) by Eltife and Nelson in 2015, will oversee any deferred maintenance expenditures.

Among the renovation projects being funded in 2016 are structural repairs to the century-old battleship USS Texas in La Porte, the only surviving U.S. warship to have served in both World Wars. Repairs also are planned for historic structures across the state, including some dating to the 1930s that were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The San Solomon Springs Courts at Balmorhea State Park will be renovated, while the historic Indian Lodge hotel at Davis Mountains State Park will receive new HVAC systems and undergo exterior repairs. The “custodian’s cottage” at Goliad State Park and Historic Site will be refurbished and assume a new role as a visitor center providing information about the El Camino Real National Historic Trail.

Other new projects include major repairs and upgrades to water and wastewater systems in 12 parks, including replacement of aging restrooms at popular state parks such as Pedernales Falls, Guadalupe River, and Mustang Island. Funding also will be used to reopen Fort Boggy State Park seven days a week. The park, midway between Dallas and Houston, had been closed Monday through Friday since 2011 due to budget constraints. The park also has added three new cabins, with several more to be completed in 2017.

A visitor center for the Franklin Mountains State Park is in the planning stage and a master design for the new Palo Pinto Mountains State Park is being developed, with construction expected to begin in the 2018-19 biennium. More than \$1 million was appropriated for smaller maintenance and repair projects including roofs, paint, and other small improvements at parks across the state.

The department has said it will prioritize repair projects that address effects of recent extreme weather. This biennium’s project list also includes designing new facilities for the

(continued on page 2)

continuing redevelopment of Galveston Island State Park, which was largely destroyed by Hurricane Ike in 2008. Of the additional funding that the department has received, \$10 million has been redirected to address flood damage to park facilities across the state over the past two years, although the TPWD has indicated that the total repair cost from these floods will likely be several times that amount. The agency plans to include in its

appropriation request to the Legislature next year the funding necessary to repair the remaining \$49 million in damages to parks from recent widespread flooding in order to avoid redirecting funds intended for capital improvements, according to the agency.

— *Blair D. Parker*