

# TEXAS TRAIL STUDY

Evaluating the need to enhance trail opportunities for Texans



December 2022



# TEXAS TRAIL STUDY

This study fulfills the requirements of a legislative mandate of Rider 40, an additional provision added to House Bill 4499 of the 87th Texas Legislature Session, titled “Rider 40: Trail Study. Out of amounts appropriated above, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) shall work jointly with the Texas Historical Commission and the Department of Transportation to conduct a study to determine the potential for historic, scenic, and/or recreational trails to be created in Texas and to identify potential partners to promote local and regional preservation efforts related to the trails studied. TPWD shall provide a report to the Legislative Budget Board by December 1, 2022.”

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the following State agencies for guiding the development of this study!



This study was prepared by Halff Associates, Inc.



Cover Photo Source: Travel Texas

# Thank You to Our Participating Organizations!

These organizations provided insight and guidance regarding regional trail issues and opportunities in Texas during the process of this study.



And a huge thank you to all other various entities and organizations around the state that are invested in the development of trails to improve the lives of Texans and celebrate the natural and cultural beauty of Texas.



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# WHY TRAILS? WHY NOW?

Texas has a long and storied history regarding trails, dating back to 18th century Spanish Texas and the El Camino Real de los Tejas. Many of today's streets and railroads are based on Native American footpaths or historic cattle trails. Trails are an important part of Texan culture and heritage. As we near 2036, the celebration of the 200th year of marking Texas's independence from Mexico, now is the perfect time to expand access to trails for all Texans to promote the natural beauty and culture of our state.

Trail usage across Texas has vastly increased, especially in recent years when COVID-19 impacts encouraged many Texans to spend more time visiting trails. In fact, recreation opinion surveys from all across the state consistently highlight trails as the first or second highest preference for recreation facilities. Trails are an important quality of life feature for people and contribute to livable communities. They provide numerous benefits, not just for recreation and health, but also for environmental preservation, transportation connectivity, and economic growth.



# CONNECTING TEXAS COMMUNITIES

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, with the help of other State agencies and partners, have conducted this study to determine the potential for historic, scenic, and/or recreational trails to be created in Texas and also to identify and foster potential partners and strategies to promote local, regional, and statewide development of trails that enhance the lives of all Texans. This study is intended to initiate the conversation about the opportunity for the development of a future statewide system of regionally-connected trails.

This study recognizes that a vision for trail networks in Texas will be ultimately carried out by entities and organizations prioritizing and developing trails at the local and regional level. However, the three state agencies focused on parks, historic sites, and trails within Texas – Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the Texas Historical Commission – do not have a mandate or adequate existing staffing capacity to coordinate the planning and development of a regional or statewide trails network. How, therefore, can and should the State of Texas assist and promote the further development of trails?



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The three state agencies focused on parks, historic sites, and trails within Texas – Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the Texas Historical Commission – do not have a mandate or adequate existing staffing capacity to coordinate the planning and development of a regional or statewide trails network.

This study provides opportunities for the State of Texas to take next steps to determine a role in the coordination and planning for a statewide system of historic, scenic, and recreational trails of regional significance for Texans today and generations to come.

Trails vary in length and regional significance, and may cross varying jurisdictions or boundaries. Trails can include:



Source: Travel Texas

## INTERREGIONAL SPINE TRAIL

A trail of regional significance that spans multiple jurisdictions and covers most or a significant portion of a region.

## REGIONAL TRAIL

A multi-jurisdictional trail which enhances regional mobility on a local scale.



## LOCAL AND IN-PARK TRAILS

A trail located entirely within a single jurisdiction, which may connect places within a city or be located entirely within one park.



# TRAILS FOR A GROWING TEXAS

Texas's population is projected to continue growing.

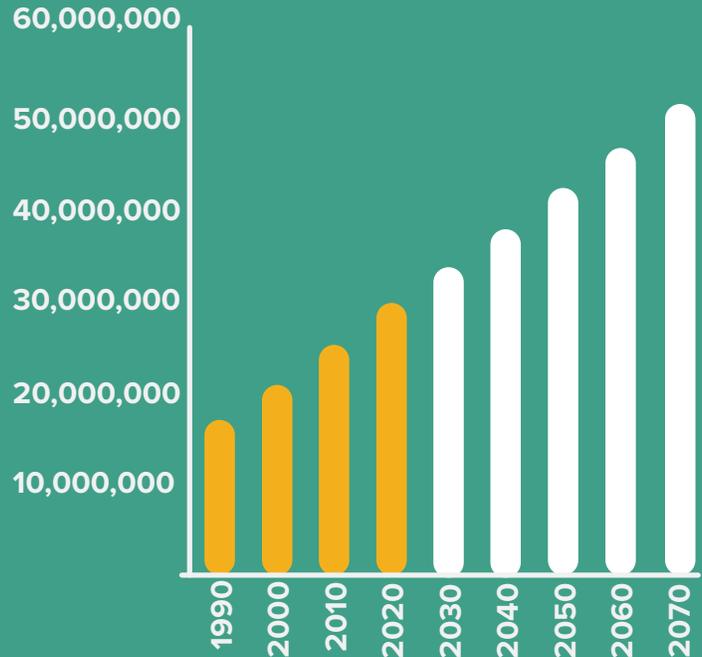
Projected Population of Texas<sup>2</sup>

## STATE PARK TOURISM

# 9 million

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS MORE THAN NINE MILLION PEOPLE HAVE VISITED THE TEXAS STATE PARKS SYSTEM. EACH YEAR THE NUMBER OF VISITORS CONTINUES TO INCREASE.<sup>1</sup>

TRAILS ARE CONSISTENTLY ONE OF THE TOP PRIORITIES FOR OUTDOOR AMENITIES NOT ONLY IN TEXAS BUT ALL ACROSS THE UNITED STATES



# TRAILS BENEFIT TEXANS

Trails provide benefits to Texans not only by providing natural areas to enjoy, but also a host of other tangible and intangible benefits as outlined in this study. Trails enhance opportunities to connect with past and future generations and can improve accessibility and health outcomes for all.



## HEALTH

Trails encourage an active lifestyle and contribute to improved mental wellbeing.



## ECONOMIC

Recreational trails bring tourist dollars, enhance property values, and promote health care savings for individuals.



## CULTURAL, HISTORICAL & NATURAL

Trails enhance access and connection to unique cultural and natural resources.



## ACCESSIBILITY & EQUITY

Trails expand access to natural spaces and promote inclusive spaces for outdoor recreation.



## INFRASTRUCTURE

Trails reduce stress on other forms of infrastructure, such as roads.

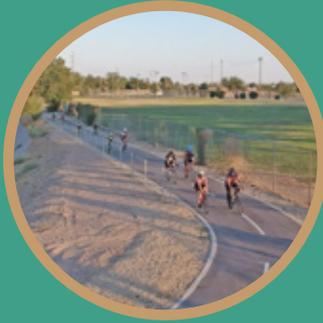


## RESILIENCY

Trails protect natural resources and contribute to community and social resiliency.

# SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES

The success of several existing regional and local efforts found across Texas can inform the creation of a statewide trails plan.



## PASO DEL NORTE TRAIL

A community-driven, collaborative effort for a 68-mile county-wide trail.



## CARACARA TRAILS

A regional effort to create a 428-mile trail network.



## GREAT SPRINGS TRAIL

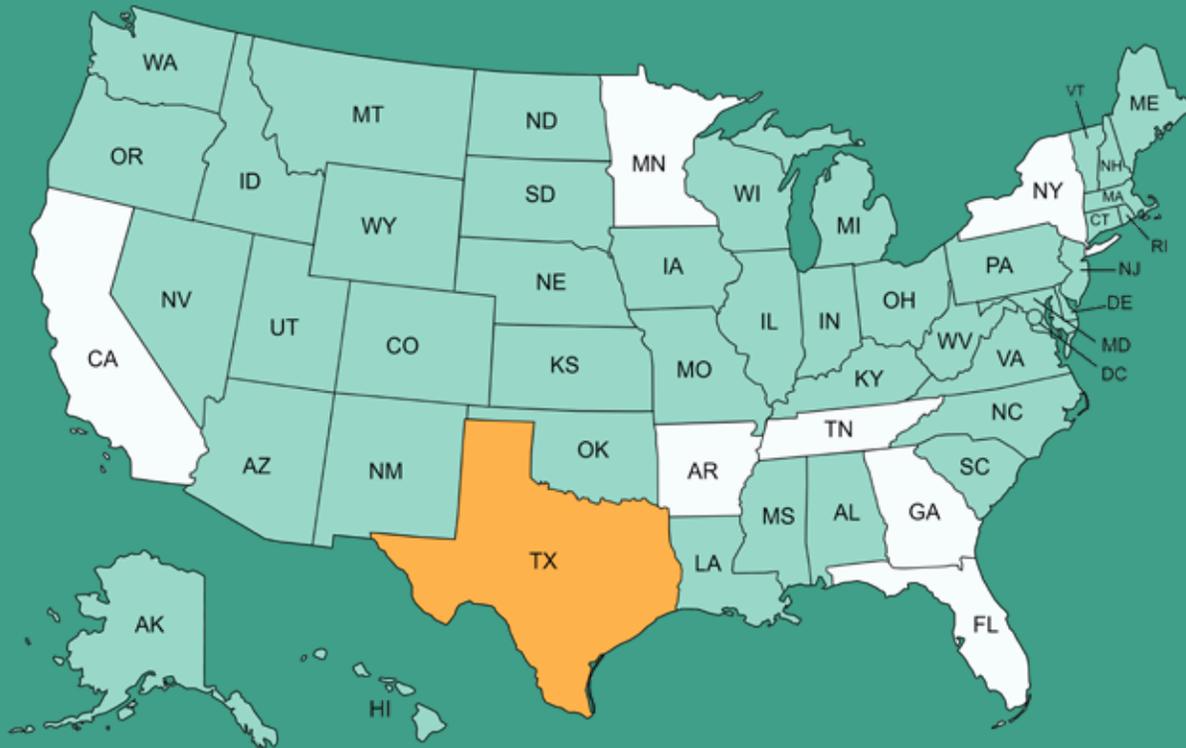
A 100-mile spring-to-spring trail leveraging existing efforts.



## NORTHEAST TEXAS TRAIL

A 130-mile recreational trail utilizing railbanking efforts.

# LESSONS FROM OTHER STATES



- Statewide Comprehensive Trails Plan
- Statewide Trails Conference & Summit
- Trails Standards & Criteria
- Statewide Trails Inventory
- Trail Town Designations

Considerations applicable to Texas

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEXAS

The following opportunities can enable the State of Texas to determine a role in the coordination and planning for a statewide system of historic, scenic, and recreational trails of regional significance for Texans today and generations to come.

1

## STATEWIDE TRAILS INVENTORY/DATABASE

A statewide inventory would provide a common starting point for future state, regional, and local trail planning.

2

## ONLINE RESOURCES & COMMUNICATIONS

A centralized resource that can be used by both partners and everyday Texans alike.

3

## COLLABORATION & POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Collaboration with a variety of entities will connect a statewide vision to regional and local contexts.

4

## TRAIL STANDARDS/DESIGN ASSISTANCE

Trail standards promote efficiency and consistency across the state.

5

## ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF TRAILS

A statewide evaluation of economic benefits will inform a statewide trails strategy.

6

## TEXAS TRAILS PLAN

A statewide plan would form the foundation for future trails planning and development in Texas.

7

## STATEWIDE TRAILS PROGRAM

Designation of oversight through a State-Led Model or Regional Sponsor Model will help advance trail planning decisions.

8

## FUNDING

Identifying specific funding sources will advance implementation of strategies for statewide trails planning and development.

9

## CONTINUED COORDINATION WITH PARTNERS

Engagement with partners from all regions should be incorporated.

## CONCLUSION

Due to the enormous size of Texas, a statewide trail network would be a great undertaking, and there is a need for coordination above the regional level to knit together local and regional efforts towards trail planning and development. Statewide trail planning can be facilitated by a coordinated, top-down initiative with State agencies to create/maintain a statewide trails database, enhance communication, and foster coordination.

# 3

# DEFINITIONS

Trails vary in length and regional significance, and may cross varying jurisdictions or boundaries. Trails can include:

## INTERREGIONAL SPINE TRAIL

A trail of regional significance that spans multiple jurisdictions and covers most or a significant portion of a region. By linking major urban areas, these trails serve as a backbone for a region's trail network and a system for smaller trail networks to connect to. Interregional spine trails are longer than most regional trails, often connecting other systems, and have organized groups leading maintenance and construction.

Interregional Spine Trail examples highlighted in this study were provided by the Participating Organizations during this process. There are other significant trail systems in Texas that might also be considered Spine Trails upon further study.



## REGIONAL TRAIL

A multi-jurisdictional trail accessible to the general public, which provides recreational opportunities and enhances regional mobility on a local scale.

## LOCAL AND IN-PARK TRAILS

A trail located entirely within a single jurisdiction, which may be a linear trail connecting places within a city or a loop trail located entirely within one park.



# TEXAS AGENCY TRAIL DEFINITIONS

Various State agencies define trails for their specific programs and purposes. Their definitions are described below.



## TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

Non-motorized, motorized, paddling, and equestrian trails built primarily for recreation uses.



Source: Texas Mountain Trail Region

## TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Ten regional driving routes, designated by blue road signs along Texas highways and labeled as “trails,” which serve as tourist pathways that highlight historical towns, areas of scenic beauty, and cultural attractions throughout the trail region.



## TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Routes intended for active transportation, including but not limited to various types of bike paths, pedestrian paths, and multi-use shared paths.

# TRAIL TYPOLOGIES

Trails come in all shapes and sizes and are called many names. In general, the different types of trail typologies include:

## NATURAL

A trail consisting of natural or hard surface materials which traverses natural open spaces such as parks and open spaces, abandoned railroad corridors, or water courses.



Source: Travel Texas

## NEAR ROAD

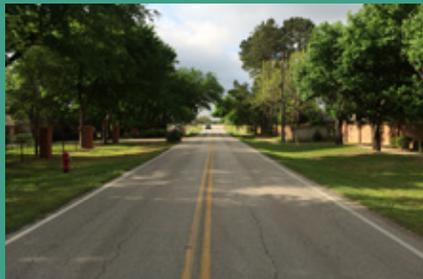
A shared-use trail or pathway located adjacent and parallel to a roadway, but separated from the main roadway.



Source: Travel Texas

## ROADWAY/BIKE LANE

A vehicle thoroughfare which may serve as a trail corridor, typically in places where a separated path or trail network is absent.



## AQUATIC

Recreational water routes that are designated for travel using either motorized or non-motorized water craft.



Source: City of Brownwood

# TRAIL USERS

Common trails users include:



Source: Travel Texas

## HIKERS

Hikers typically utilize trails for recreation purposes, especially trails in natural settings.



## WALKERS AND RUNNERS

Walkers and runners may find trail networks an ideal setting for fitness, sport, and leisure.



Source: TPWD

## PEOPLE/PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Many trail systems accommodate trail users who utilize a walker, wheelchair, stroller, or similar wheeled assistive device.



Source: Travel Texas

## EQUESTRIAN RIDERS

Equestrian users, or horseback riders, may use trails for recreational use.



Source: TPWD

## CYCLISTS

General cyclists may feel most comfortable riding in parks, along shared- and multi-use paths, or on-street in neighborhoods with low traffic. There is increasing use of e-bikes.



Source: TPWD

## MOUNTAIN BIKERS

Mountain bikers will typically utilize trails found in large natural settings and programmed specifically for off-road cycling.



## PADDLERS

Some trails systems include coastal and inland paddling trails which accommodate stand-up paddle boarders, canoers, and kayakers, and sometimes boats.



Source: TxDOT

## IN-LINE SKATERS AND SKATEBOARDERS

Paved multi-use trails that accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists are likely to attract in-line skaters and skateboarders as well.



Source: Barnwell Mountain Recreation Area

## OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE/ MOTORIZED USERS

Some natural trail systems may be designed for motorized users on a variety of vehicles, which may include all-terrain vehicles or off-road motor bikes.



# STATE SNAPSHOT

Texas is not only the second largest state in the United States by land mass but also the second largest in population with around 27 million residents. Of those residents, the median age is 35 years old, evenly split between men and women. During the past decade, urbanized metropolitan areas in Texas have been growing dramatically, while many rural counties are experiencing slow growth or population decline. According to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 72 percent of the state's population lives in the six largest metropolitan areas.

## STATE HEALTH

DISABLED POPULATION<sup>3</sup>  
**12%**

OBESE POPULATION<sup>3</sup>  
**36%**

POPULATION WITH ANXIETY/DEPRESSION<sup>4</sup>  
**34%**

### STATE HEALTH RANKING

**31<sup>st</sup>**

HEALTHIEST STATE IN THE UNITED STATES<sup>5</sup>

### YOUTH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN TEXAS

**79%**

OF TEXAS YOUTH FAIL TO MEET THE RECOMMENDED DAILY 60+ MINUTES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY<sup>6</sup>

### ADULT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN TEXAS

**42%** Adult population in Texas is aerobically active for the recommended minimum of 150 minutes per week<sup>5</sup>

### AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT PER PERSON



**\$6,923** Annual Health care costs<sup>7</sup>



**\$323** Annual Sports, Recreation, and Exercise spending<sup>3</sup>

### STATE PARK TOURISM

**9 million**

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS MORE THAN NINE MILLION PEOPLE HAVE VISITED THE TEXAS STATE PARKS SYSTEM. EACH YEAR THE NUMBER OF VISITORS CONTINUES TO INCREASE.<sup>1</sup>

**\$35** annual bike spending<sup>3</sup>



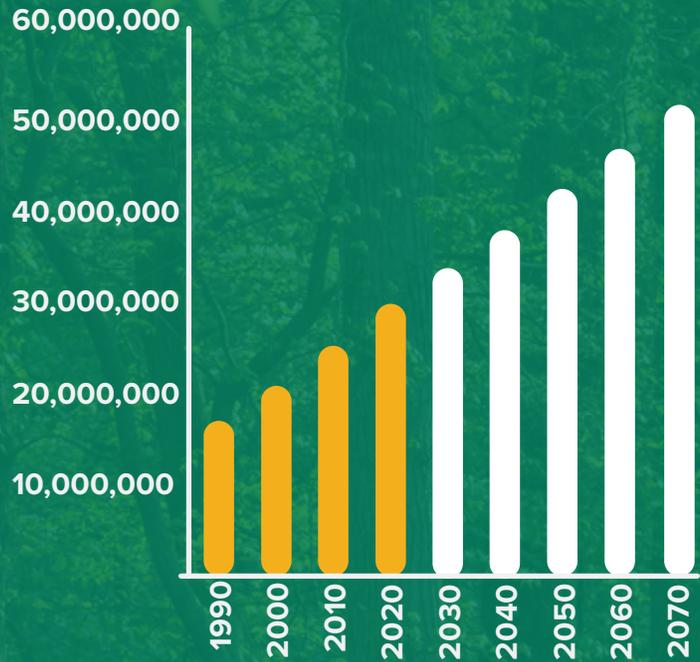
**\$15,012** annual transportation costs<sup>3</sup>

(Family of 4)



## GROWTH

- Texas's population is projected to increase by more than 70 percent, from 29.7 million in 2020 to nearly 51.5 million in 2070.<sup>2</sup>
- Over 60 percent of statewide population growth between 2020 and 2070 is projected to occur within the regions of Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and South Central Texas (San Antonio Area).<sup>2</sup>



Source: Travel Texas



# TRAIL BENEFITS

## health

BENEFIT 1

Trails contribute to individual and community health by encouraging an active lifestyle, providing spaces for socialization and gathering, and increasing exposure and interconnectedness with nature, which has been shown to improve levels of mental wellbeing.



79%  
SURGE OF  
TRAIL USE  
SINCE MARCH  
2020<sup>8</sup>

SURVEY  
RESPONSES  
SAID ACCESS  
TO OPEN  
SPACES HAD REDUCED  
STRESS LEVELS DURING  
THE PANDEMIC<sup>8</sup>

46%

A study of 1,211 Texans found that people living near a trail were more likely to walk 150 minutes per week compared to those not living close to a trail<sup>9</sup>



Even small levels of exposure to natural elements can improve attention span and overall quality of life.

A 2014 study found that trail users were significantly less likely to be overweight or obese compared with trail non-users.<sup>10</sup>

### Trail use is linked to active aging



Trail usage has been linked to increased socialization.





# economic

BENEFIT 2

Trails bring economic benefits to both individuals and communities through direct benefits and costs saved. Recreational trails bring tourist dollars to a region, enhance property values, and the health benefits from trail usage translates to health care savings for individuals.

Trails provide both individual and community economic benefits through direct and indirect revenue as well as costs avoided.

**\$1** invested in trails = **\$3** in medical savings<sup>11</sup>

### HEALTH SAVINGS OF EXERCISERS

**\$1,600**  
annual health care savings per trail user

**14%** fewer health care claims

**\$2.4 M**  
annual health care costs avoided<sup>11</sup>

**41%** fewer claims greater than \$5,000<sup>12</sup>

Texas (TPWD) receives the second largest amount of funding from Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) fuel taxes in the country. Regional OHV trail systems in West Virginia and Minnesota attract many OHV trail users per year with significant positive economic impacts. **There is a potential economic opportunity available for Texas if it had more properties and opportunities available for motorized (OHV) recreation.**

Projected \$23.3 million in economic benefits to Travis, Hays, Comal, and Bexar counties from the Great Springs Trail<sup>13</sup>

The Northeast Texas Trail assessed a long-term benefit of \$10.4 million as of 2014<sup>14</sup>



Up to **20%** Increased value of homes near outdoor amenities<sup>15</sup>

### AVERAGE SPENT ON RECREATIONAL TRIPS<sup>16</sup>

**\$60.26**

trail-based day trips

**\$43.81**

bicycle-related day trips



Nearly **300,000** Texans work in the outdoor recreation industry as of 2020<sup>17</sup>

Source: TxDOT



BENEFIT 3

# cultural, historical & natural

The variety of cultural, historic, and natural resources in Texas are vast and unique. Trails enhance access to, connect with, and learn from these resources in ways that traditional means cannot. Trails and greenways are an important part of preserving the past for future generations.



Protected habitat corridors link fragmented wildlife habitats.

**PUBLIC ART** on trails establishes trails as a **COMMUNITY ASSET** and promotes **COMMUNITY IDENTITY**

## Cultural & Historic Resources Case Study: El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail

In active use for more than 150 years, El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail traverses 2,580 miles from the Rio Grande Valley through Central Texas to the Red River Valley of Louisiana. Historically, “royal roads” such as this one, connected Mexico City to far-reaching regions and was used by Spanish, Indigenous, French, Anglo, and Black travelers. Along this route, one can experience the histories of indigenous trade routes, Spanish missionaries, cattle ranching, and Texas independence and statehood. The national historic trail is managed by the National Park Service in collaboration with the Texas Historical Commission, local communities, and nonprofit partners.





BENEFIT 4

# accessibility & equity

Trails benefit and contribute to equity and diversity within communities by expanding access to natural spaces, as well as promoting inclusive spaces for outdoor recreation. Increasing community connections to greenspace, schools, and other important nodes can help sustain healthy, equitable, and resilient communities.



## TRAIL DEVELOPMENT CAN HELP REDUCE HEALTH AND OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE INEQUITIES FACED BY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

### 1 in 4

AMERICAN ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY<sup>18</sup>

Trails are transportation and recreational facilities and should be accessible in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

### 3x

LIKELIHOOD THAT NON-WHITE AND LOWER-INCOME RESIDENTS LIVE

IN "NATURE-DEPRIVED" COMMUNITIES<sup>18</sup>

Ensuring a trail is accessible for all abilities is a crucial part of making a trail equitable for all users.

Factors of **ACCESSIBILITY** range from the physical trail itself to the **AMENITIES** and **COMMUNICATION** offered along the trail, as well as how **SAFE** a user feels on the trail.



Source: TPWD

Compared to other recreational activities trails have very low barriers to usage and accessibility.

Source: Travel Texas

# infrastructure

BENEFIT 5



Trails are an important component of civic infrastructure. One important function is to reduce stress on other forms of infrastructure by removing cars from roads, providing flood buffers, or improving water quality.

AVERAGE TIME SPENT COMMUTING:

104 hours per year

in Austin<sup>19</sup>

75 hours per year

in Houston<sup>20</sup>

\$7.7 MILLION

AVERAGE COST OF  
RECONSTRUCTING ONE  
MILE OF A SINGLE LANE  
HIGHWAY IN 2014<sup>21</sup>

\$700,000

AVERAGE COST OF  
CONSTRUCTING A MILE OF  
TRAIL<sup>22</sup>



Green infrastructure, often associated with trails, acts as a natural defense against flooding, erosion, and wildfires.<sup>23</sup>



Increasing the share of short trips (under 1 mile) made by walking or cycling to 50% could result in 21 billion less driven miles<sup>24</sup>



# resiliency

BENEFIT 6

Trails contribute to improved community resilience by protecting natural resources and mitigating flood impacts, as well as enhancing access to opportunities for individual health.<sup>25</sup>



## 1 IN 10

TEXANS EXPOSED TO MODERATE OR HIGH-RISK RIVERINE FLOODING EACH YEAR<sup>26</sup>



EACH MILE DRIVEN IS EQUIVALENT TO



1 POUND OF CO<sub>2</sub><sup>24</sup>

EVEN A MODERATE SHIFT TOWARDS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION COULD REDUCE

## 27 MILLION TONS OF CO<sub>2</sub><sup>24</sup>

EMISSIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

TRAILS AS GATHERING PLACES CONTRIBUTE TO

## social resiliency



Source: TxDOT





# TRAILS STATUS BY REGION

There is no comprehensive inventory of all trails within Texas. This study focuses on larger, regional trails as well as trails within State Parks. The goal is to generally identify regions that have successfully implemented regional trails, regions that mostly lack regional trails, and regions whose residents desire more trails.



# REGION 1 WEST TEXAS

Region 1 is located in West Texas and is primarily comprised of the following eco-regions: Chihuahuan Desert, High Plain, Edwards Plateau, and small portions of Central Great Plain and Southwestern Tableland. The major cities in this region include Midland, Odessa, and El Paso. One of the regional trail efforts in this region includes the proposed Paso del Norte Trail (see page 27).



## PUBLIC INPUT

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT IS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR MAJOR WEST TEXAS CITIES<sup>27</sup>

**50%**

### Sweetwater

surveys specified a desire for pedestrian connections to parks<sup>27</sup>



## BIKING AND WALKING

were the most formative outdoor trail activities for people in this region<sup>28</sup>



Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan surveys indicate that sidewalks and trails were lacking within **REGION 1**<sup>28</sup>



## PASO DEL NORTE TRAIL

The Paso del Norte Trail is a community-driven, collaborative effort to develop a county-wide trail in El Paso County. The roughly 68-mile span of the Paso del Norte Trail is divided into five distinct districts, each broadly defined by their unique geographical, historical, and cultural context, as well as various amenities and attractions that help define them.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Development of the Paso del Norte Trail is guided by a Trail Advisory Committee and conceptual master plan to maximize community support and county-wide collaboration. The project supports regional connectivity, preserves the area's history and culture, including the Rio Grande River, and builds advocacy support through educational and volunteer opportunities. The identification of priority segments carries forth the momentum of the system's existing 20 miles of trails.<sup>29</sup>

# REGION 2

SOUTH TEXAS/GULF

Region 2 is located in Southern Texas bordering Mexico and the lower portion of the Texas Gulf Coast. It is primarily comprised of the following eco-regions: Southern Texas Plain, Gulf Coast Prairie and Marsh, East Central Texas Plain, and a small portion of Texas Blackland Prairie. The major cities in this region include Corpus Christi and Brownsville. One of the regional trail efforts in this region includes the proposed Caracara Trails (see page 29).



### State Historic Sites

- 1 Fannin Battleground, Fannin
- 2 Fulton Mansion, Rockport
- 3 Kreische Brewery, La Grange
- 4 Lipantitlan, Mathis
- 5 Monument Hill, La Grange
- 6 Palmito Ranch Battlefield, Brownsville
- 7 Port Isabel Lighthouse, Port Isabel



See Inset (pg. 29)



## PUBLIC INPUT

VICTORIA RESIDENTS UTILIZED **60%** WALKING, HIKING AND BIKING TRAILS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS<sup>27</sup>

### South Texas Region

Citizens frequently use off-street multi-use trails, with survey results stating these facilities are typically used several times per month<sup>27</sup>



## BIKING TRAILS

A common response from recent public input within this region is a desire for acquiring and developing additional trails or places to ride a bicycle<sup>27</sup>



Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan surveys indicated that **REGION 2** had the strongest response percentage of the six regions that trails were lacking within both the communities and parks<sup>28</sup>

“Embracing Active Tourism – and Motivating People to Be More Active – in the Lower Rio Grande Valley”



## CARACARA TRAILS

The Caracara Trails is a vision for a 428-mile trail network that will link the rich natural, cultural and historical resources the area is known for – creating a unified regional identity for outdoor tourism, promoting healthier lifestyles and generating a new sense of community pride for everyone who lives there.

Through partnership between The Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation, the University of Texas School of Public Health, and local municipalities, the Caracara Trails is enhancing the momentum and direction of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Tourism Plan to amplify regional connectivity.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

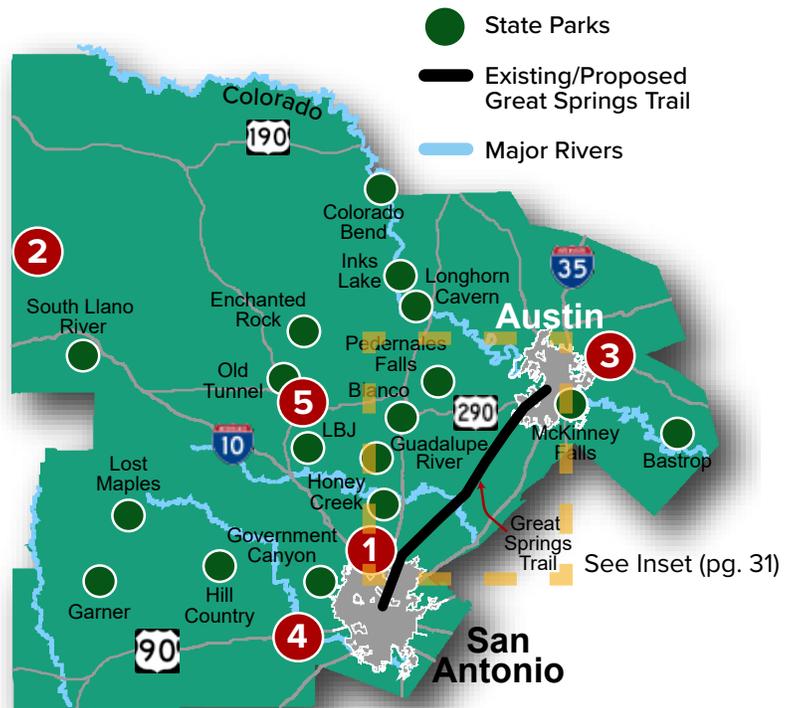
The Caracara Trails system will further drive economic development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and boost local economies while conserving the area’s unique ecological value. In the 10-year period following completion of the Caracara Trails, upwards of \$40 million is expected in tourist spending, and the construction phase for six projects of the trail is expected to generate \$56 million in economic impacts.<sup>30</sup>

# REGION 3 CENTRAL TEXAS

Region 3 is located in Central Texas and is primarily comprised of the following eco-regions: Edwards Plateau, Texas Blackland Prairie, and a small portion of Southern Texas Plain. Major cities in this region include Austin and San Antonio. One of the regional trail efforts in this region includes the proposed Great Springs Project (see page 31).

## State Historic Sites

- 1 Casa Navarro, San Antonio
- 2 Fort McKavett, near Menard
- 3 French Legation, Austin
- 4 Landmark Inn, Castroville
- 5 National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredricksburg



## PUBLIC INPUT

ROUND ROCK CITIZENS WANT THEIR CITY TO HAVE ONE OF THE BEST TRAILS SYSTEMS IN THE ENTIRE STATE<sup>27</sup>

**80%**

## REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Several municipalities within the Central Texas region indicated a particular desire for improved local and regional trail connectivity, especially to connect various areas of their cities and parks<sup>27</sup>



## Central Texas Communities

Survey results from cities throughout this region, such as San Marcos, Georgetown, Buda, and Marble Falls, noted that walking/hiking and nature trails were one of the most important types of recreational facilities in the community<sup>27</sup>



“From the Alamo to the Capitol”



## GREAT SPRINGS TRAIL

Great Springs Project is creating a network of spring-to-spring trails and a corridor of protected lands over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, between Austin and San Antonio. This green corridor will be connected by a network of spring-to-spring trails, linking the four iconic springs of Central Texas: Barton Springs, San Marcos Springs, Comal Springs, and San Antonio Springs.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Great Springs Project is leveraging momentum to complete the Great Springs Trail by 2036 by maximizing their partnerships with organizations and municipalities which have existing and ongoing trail development. Great Springs Project is closing the gap on funding by clearly identifying sources as well as serving as an advocate for their partners to gain funding. The completed project will enhance conservation and connectivity of the region. The Great Springs Trail will provide an estimated \$55,920,000 in total annual benefits.<sup>13</sup>

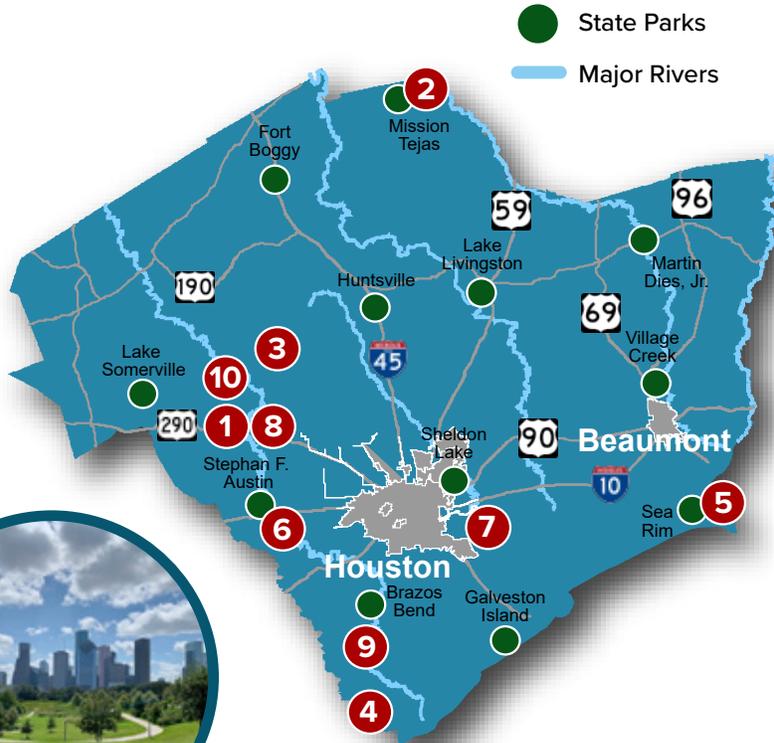
# REGION 4

## HOUSTON/EAST TEXAS

Region 4 is located in East Texas and is primarily comprised of the following eco-regions: Western Gulf Coastal Plain, East Central Texas Plain, Gulf Coast Prairie and Marsh, and some Texas Blackland Prairie. The major cities in this region include Houston and Beaumont. There are many urban and in-park trails across the Greater Houston metropolitan area, as well as within state and national parkland, yet there are not currently any prominent regional spine trail planning entities focused on developing trails across the region. The 129-mile Lone Star Trail through the Sam Houston National Forest provides potential for connection with a future spine trail although the region is currently lacking a champion to lead this effort.

### State Historic Sites

- 1 Barrington Plantation, Washington
- 2 Caddo Mounds, Alto
- 3 Fanthorp Inn, Anderson
- 4 Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria
- 5 Sabine Pass Battleground, Sabine Pass
- 6 San Felipe de Austin, San Felipe
- 7 San Jacinto Battleground, La Porte
- 8 Star of the Republic Museum, Washington
- 9 Varner-Hogg Plantation, West Columbia
- 10 Washington-on-the-Brazos, Washington



**PUBLIC INPUT**  
 HIGHEST PERCENTAGE  
 OF ALL REGIONS SURVEYED  
 SAID... SIDEWALKS AND  
 TRAILS ARE LACKING IN THEIR  
 COMMUNITIES AND PARKS<sup>28</sup>

## East Texas Communities

Paved multi-use and nature trails, were listed within the top three most important recreational facilities for families and households<sup>27</sup>

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIVITY

Citizens within this area placed a high priority for greater trail connections to neighborhoods and neighborhood parks<sup>27</sup>

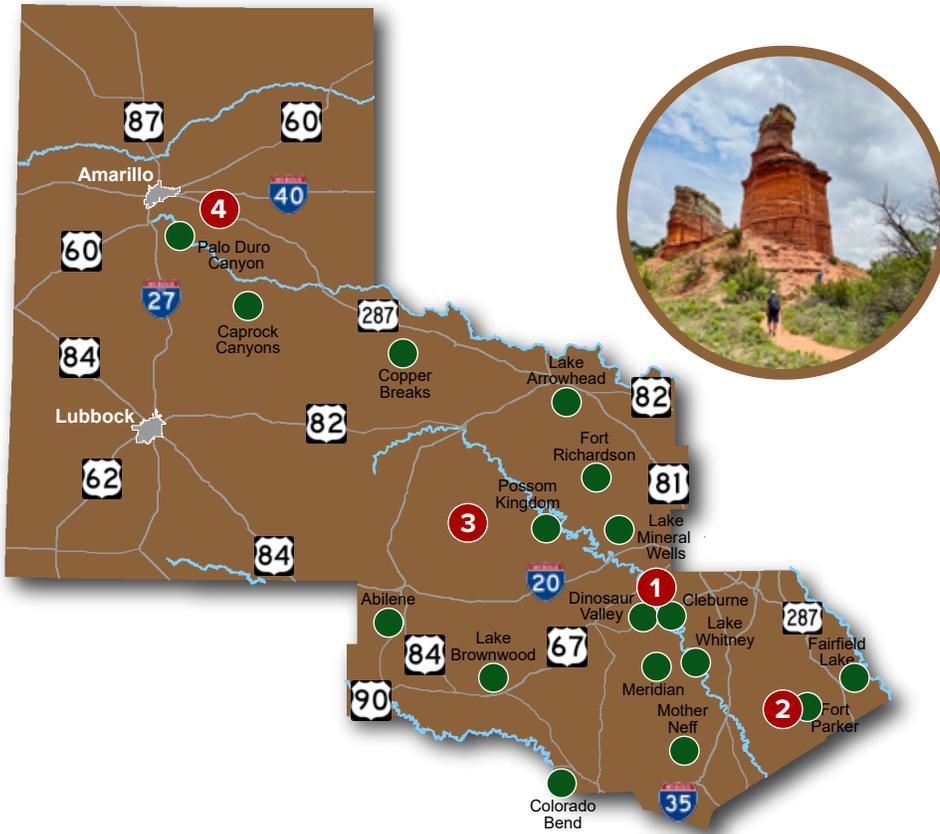


Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan surveys in **REGION 4** listed hiking as the trail-related activity that was most significant to respondents<sup>28</sup>

# REGION 5

## PANHANDLE/NORTH TEXAS

Region 5 is located in the Panhandle/North Texas region and is comprised of the following eco-regions: High Plain, Southwestern Tableland, Central Great Plain, Cross Timber, and small portions of Texas Blackland Prairie and Edwards Plateau. The major cities in this region include Amarillo and Lubbock. Most trails within this region are found in city parks or state parks and currently there are not any prominent planning entities focused on developing spine trails across the region. The nearly 25-mile Caprock Canyon Trail, maintained by TPWD, provides potential for a connection with a future spine trail although the region is currently lacking a champion to lead this effort.



● State Parks

— Major Rivers

### State Historic Sites

- 1 Acton, Acton
- 2 Confederate Reunion Grounds, Mexia
- 3 Fort Griffin, Albany
- 4 Goodnight Ranch, near Claude



### PUBLIC INPUT

LUBBOCK NOTED THAT HIKE AND BIKE TRAILS WERE THE RECREATIONAL FACILITY THEIR FAMILY WAS MOST INTERESTED IN<sup>27</sup>

63%



### OFF-STREET PAVED TRAILS

Amarillo citizens feel that off-street paved trails are the most needed type of trail within the community<sup>27</sup>

### Panhandle and North Texas Communities



indicated that trails are supported amenities and are frequently used, where available<sup>27</sup>

### REGION 5

Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan surveys indicated a need for sidewalks, more than most other regions<sup>28</sup>

# REGION 6

## NORTHEAST TEXAS

Region 6 is located in the Northeast area of the state and is primarily comprised of the following eco-regions: Western Gulf Coastal Plain, East Central Texas Plain, Texas Blackland Prairie, and some Cross Timber. The major cities in this region include Dallas, Fort Worth, Tyler, Longview, Lufkin, and Nacogdoches. One of the regional trail efforts in this region includes the proposed Northeast Texas Trail project (see page 35).



-  State Parks
-  Existing/Proposed Northeast Texas Trail
-  Major Rivers

### State Historic Sites

-  1 Eisenhower Birthplace, Denison
-  2 Mission Dolores, San Augustine
-  3 Sam Bell Maxey House, Paris
-  4 Sam Rayburn House, Bonham
-  5 Starr Family Home, Marshall



## PUBLIC INPUT

DENISON RESPONDENTS USE TRAIL OR BIKEWAY FACILITIES SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK<sup>27</sup>

## Northeast Texas Major Cities

Identified trails, both nature and multi-use, as facilities most often used or of higher priority<sup>27</sup>

## ENHANCED CONNECTIVITY



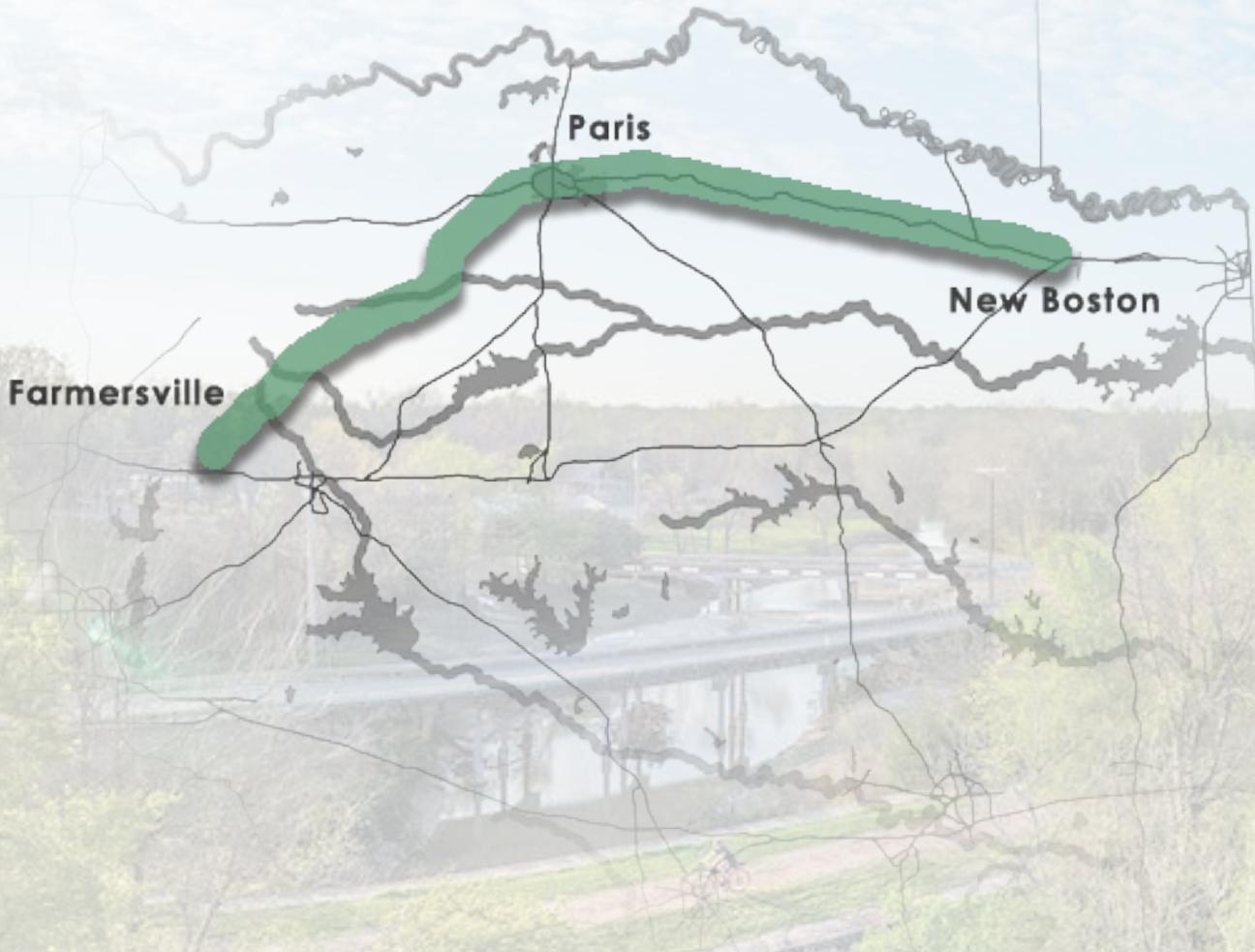
Public feedback expressed desired for connectivity to locations such as local schools, other parks and scenic areas, sports fields and recreational facilities<sup>27</sup>

Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan surveys indicate trails were found to be lacking within communities and parks REGION 6<sup>28</sup>





“A 130-mile recreational trail rolling over rural Northeast Texas”



## NORTHEAST TEXAS TRAIL

The Northeast Texas Trail Coalition is a group overseeing the planning and development of a 130-mile-long hiking, biking, and equestrian trail from Farmersville to New Boston to bring connectivity to the region.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Development of the Northeast Texas Trail (NETT) leverages the 1983 federal law called the National Trails System Act Amendments and the railbanking process to acquire land for the construction of the NETT project at no cost. Funding for this trail is primarily found through grants or private fundraising efforts. The first acquisition of land towards what is now the Northeast Texas Trail was led by the City of New Boston in 2001, and the Northeast Texas Trail Coalition, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has carried existing momentum for the project with the guidance of an Executive Committee, Board of Directors, by-laws, and construction and marketing committees.<sup>14</sup>

# TEXAS REGIONS

## SUMMARY

It is clear that within the six defined regions of Texas, there are only a few groups and agencies planning for a connected system of trails beyond cities and counties. Public opinion surveys indicate, however, that Texans are increasingly desiring trails and trail connections for outdoor recreation. While many of the larger cities in Texas have a growing networks of trails, many rural communities do not and oftentimes lack the funds and capabilities to build trails.

Beyond trail development in Texas cities, there are many private entities and grassroots organizations that are dedicated to the planning and development of trails. However, these entities tend to be focused on shorter, inter-city trails that do not typically extend to a regional level. As a result, these entities do not currently have the tools to communicate with each other and effectively coordinate on a larger scale. The three State agencies focused on parks, historic sites, and trails within Texas – Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the Texas Historical Commission do not have a mandate or adequate existing staffing capacity to coordinate the planning and development of a regional or statewide trails network.



## What Texans are Saying About Trails

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TRAILS ARE CONSISTENTLY ONE OF THE TOP PRIORITIES FOR OUTDOOR AMENITIES NOT ONLY IN TEXAS BUT ALL ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

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### Outdoor Activities Most Needed by Region\*

Region	Most Common Response	Second Most Common Response
Region 1	Parks/Park Capacity	Childrens Activities
Region 2	Trails	Campgrounds
Region 3	Trails	Parks/Park Capacity
Region 4	Trails	Parks/Park Capacity
Region 5	Trails	Fishing
Region 6	Trails	Swimming Pools

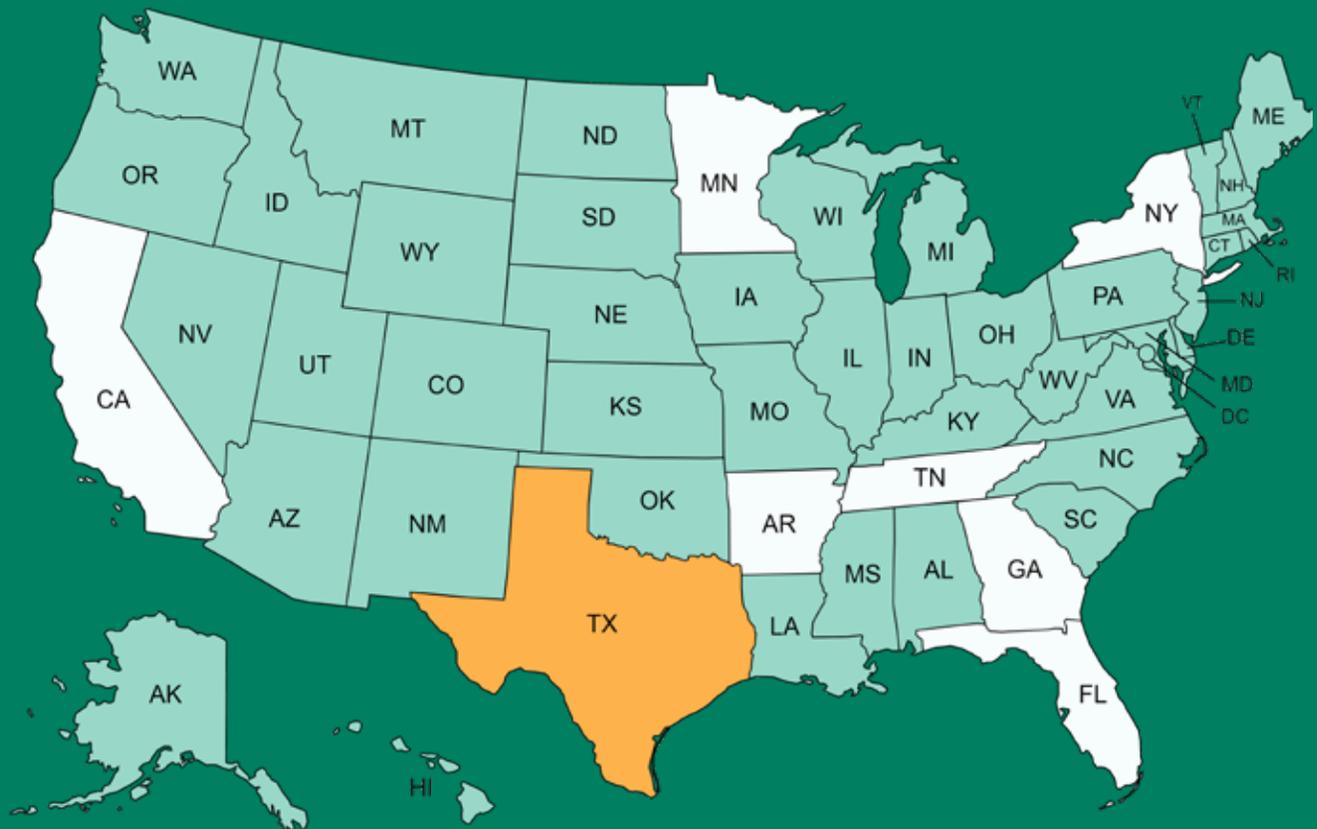
\*2018 Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan survey results

# 7

# CASE STUDIES

To provide perspective of the current status of trails in Texas, a review of trail planning efforts in other states can serve as a valuable baseline comparison. However, it is important to examine states with similar characteristics to gain meaningful comparisons. In total, 15 states from across the nation were studied for applicability to Texas. The full list can be found in the Appendix.

Seven states were selected for a comparison with Texas because they share one or more characteristics such as similar political, geographic, and socio-economic characteristics, and in some cases, provide competition to Texas for tourists. Additionally, most of these states have statewide coordination for their trail programs, and thus, present strong case studies for Texas to review. The following pages introduce efforts in these seven states, including Arkansas, California, Georgia, Minnesota, New York, and Tennessee.



# ARKANSAS

Arkansas does not have a statewide trail master plan; instead, the State uses the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, which was completed in 2014. This plan focuses on connecting communities to the successful Razorback Regional Greenway project.

Authority for the statewide trails system within Arkansas is held by the State Parks Division of the Department of Parks and Tourism. The overseeing body within this division is the Arkansas Trails Council. While not specifically considered a statewide trail plan, in 2013 the Arkansas Department of Transportation initiated an update to the 1998 Arkansas State Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to address state policies related to bicycling and walking, as well as the development of roads, trails, sidewalks, and other related infrastructure.



## Applicability to Texas

With the Razorback Regional Greenway serving as a regional 'spine,' the NWA Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan focuses on connecting communities to the regional greenway system, and helping each community to be a safer, healthier and more enjoyable place for residents, businesses, and visitors. This model could also be applied to Texas due to the state's size and successful regional 'spine' trails.

## Funding

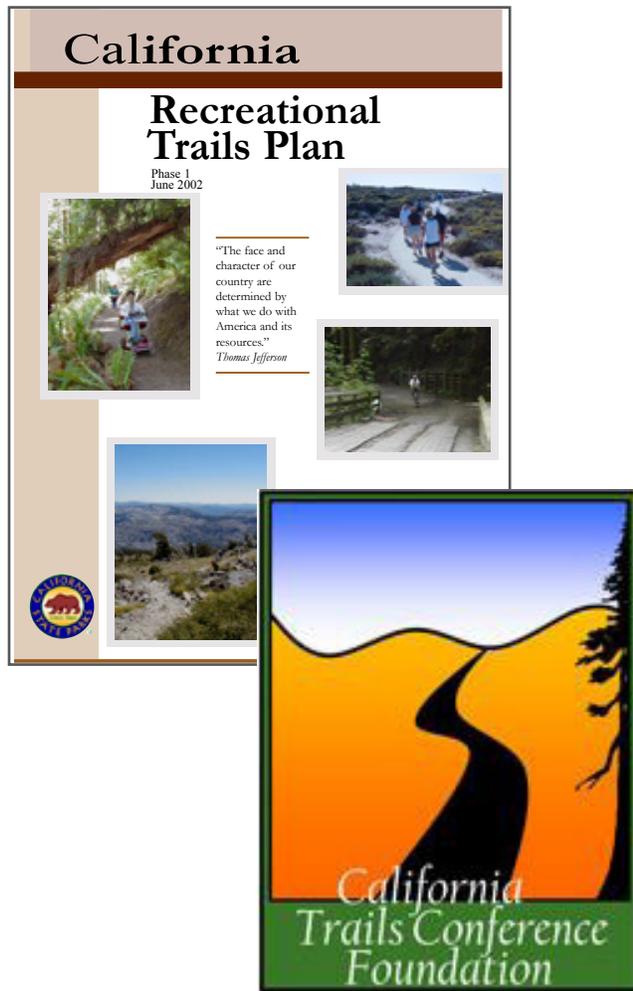
The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Recreational Trail Grant is administered by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department; this program has contributed roughly \$1.3 million per year for the construction and rehabilitation of trails in Arkansas.

The Trails for Life grant program provides funds for the development of facilities in local neighborhoods and parks. No match is required for this grant which is funded through the Arkansas Department of Health from the Tobacco Settlement Proceeds Act.

# CALIFORNIA

The first California Recreational Trails Plan was completed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation in 1978, with an update completed in 2002, and progress reports required every two years. The plan provides guidance for integrating state trails systems with local and private trail systems.

The Roads and Trails Program is within the Planning Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The Program oversees the California Recreational Trails Plan, organizes and hosts the Trails and Greenways Conference, provides support and tools on trail management, and generally assists in the development of Road and Trail Management Plans for individual parks.



## Applicability to Texas

Statewide and regional trail conferences, like the California Trails and Greenways Conference, could be held by the State of Texas in order to disseminate current information on trail planning, and to promote diversity, encourage widespread use, and plan future actions with coordination across jurisdictional levels.

California's strategy to support and continue dialogue among private property owners could be especially relevant in Texas, where nearly 96 percent of land is privately owned.

## Funding

The California Department of Transportation operates the Active Transportation Program (ATP) to encourage increased use of active modes of transportation such as walking and biking. The ATP is funded by the following sources:

- State and federal funding: 100% of federal Transportation Alternative Program funds, \$21 million of federal Highway Safety Improvement Program funds
- \$100 million annually from the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account (SB1)

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funds annually for recreational trails and trails-related projects. The RTP is administered at the federal level by the Federal Highway Administration. It is administered at the state level by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Transportation Active Transportation Program.

# FLORIDA

The Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan was adopted in 1998 and recently updated for the 2019 – 2023 time frame. This update:

- identifies regional trail corridors within a prioritized system
- provides funding and development strategies, and
- establishes partnerships for the development and management of trails within the system.

The State of Florida created the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) to oversee administration of the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan. The OGT is a part of the Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Recreation and Parks. The OGT provides statewide leadership and coordination to establish, expand and promote non-motorized trails that make up the Florida Greenways and Trails System.



## Applicability to Texas

“Trail Town” is a designation created by Florida to boost ecotourism in small towns. Each Trail Town is officially recognized and receives free Trail Town signs, stickers, and publicity. The Trail Town Designation is one program that could be brought to Texas to encourage trail use in small communities. This designation could increase tourism in these areas through the promotion of walkability to unique destinations in each community.

Since 1979 the State has adopted legislation that prioritizes establishing a network of recreational trails. This legislation spurred the creation of the Office of Greenways and Trails, The Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan, the Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail Program, and other agencies and funding sources that make statewide trail development possible.

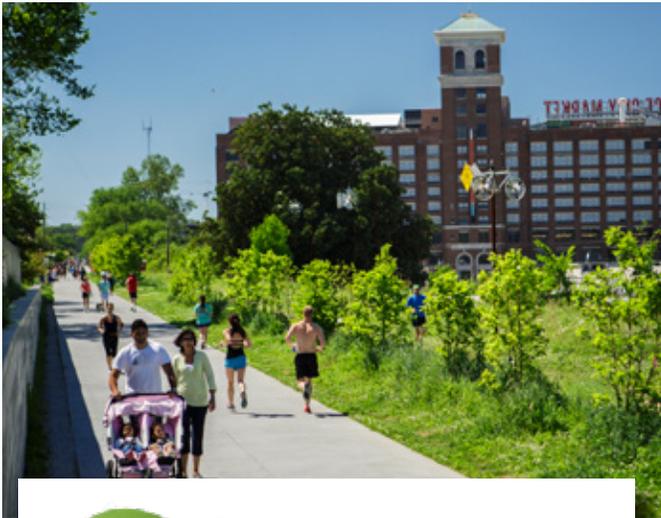
## Funding

The Recreational Trails Program, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, provides federal grants for projects that provide, renovate or maintain motorized and non-motorized recreational trails, trail heads and trailside facilities.

The Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail Program provides funding for the development of a statewide system of interconnected paved multi-use trails (SUN Trail network) for bicyclists and pedestrians, physically separated from the road. Administration of the SUN Trail program is by the Florida Department of Transportation. The SUN Trail Program receives funding from an annual allocation of new vehicle tag revenues.

# GEORGIA

Georgia is one of two states studied and included in this section without a statewide trails organization (Arkansas being the other), and currently there is not a statewide trail network nor a statewide plan for trail development. Trails managed and maintained by the State include those located within Georgia State Parks, which are operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.



Source: beltline.org (top, bottom) gaoutdoors.org (middle)

## Applicability to Texas

A coalition of trail-supporting organizations has led to the “Georgia Trail Summit,” which aims to foster partnerships with local governments, nonprofits and education groups, as well as to advocate for policy improvements.

## Funding

Georgia has received \$102 million in federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grants for the improvement of outdoor spaces. The State of Georgia also receives federal funding from the FHWA for the Recreational Trails Program grants.

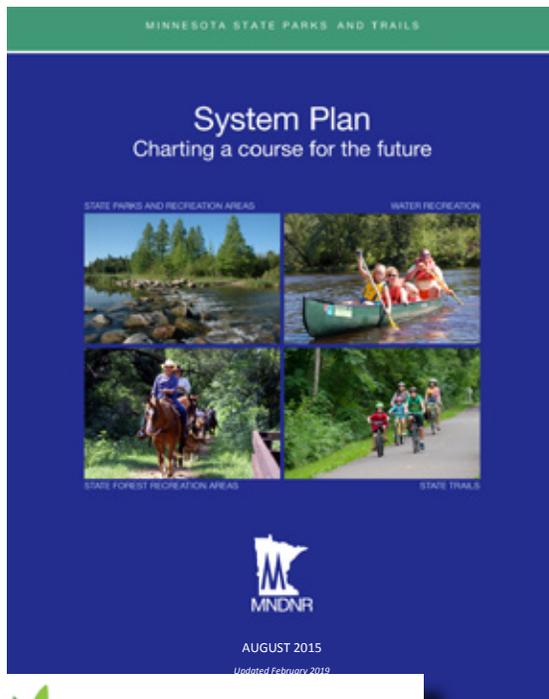
The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program is administered by the state’s Department of Natural Resources and provides funding to support parks and trails as well as to provide stewardship and acquisition of critical conservation lands. Eligible projects include those that support state trails or local trails of state and regional significance.

- The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act dedicates 40 percent of existing state sales and use taxes on outdoor sporting goods to fund the stewardship projects eligible in this program. For local projects, the grant amount is between \$500,000 and \$3 million, but there is no minimum or maximum amount set for state projects.

# MINNESOTA

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources first adopted the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan in 2015 and updated the plan in 2019. This plan is uniquely focused upon providing strategic guidance for state parks, state trails, and state recreation areas. Additionally, the plan discusses the benefits that could be realized by creating a unified trail brand through state and local partnerships, as opposed to piecemeal trail branding along corridors.

The Minnesota Parks and Trails Division is within the Department of Natural Resources and oversees state trails and parks. Much like Texas, trails outside of state parks in Minnesota are not managed by the Department of Natural Resources.



## Applicability to Texas

The Minnesota Parks and Trails Division developed eight criteria to assess how well existing, or planned and proposed, trails meet the “fit and function” of the authorized state trail system. The development of a standard criteria in Texas could streamline the planning and funding process for trails within Texas and focus trail completion efforts to certain corridors.

The Minnesota Parks and Trails Division coordinates with partners, such as nonprofits and local municipalities, so that activities are consistent with statute, policy, and Division guidelines. Partners enhance trail level-of-service capacity. Local partners have authority to develop and manage their own trail segments within authorized state corridors, which benefits trail users with a single identifiable trail route. Partnerships with trail support groups are the cornerstone of Minnesota’s successful trails system, along with legislative support, proactive trail providers, and recognition for tourism potential.

## Funding

The Minnesota Department of Transportation supports the Active Transportation (AT) Program, which provides grants for planning, education and encouragement, engineering studies, and infrastructure investment related to walking, biking, and rolling.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources supports the Regional Trail Grant Program which provides grants to local governments for the acquisition and development of trail facilities outside the seven-county metropolitan area that are considered of regional or statewide significance.

# NEW YORK

In 2021, the State of New York adopted a Statewide Greenway Trails Plan that aims to expand and increase the connectivity and cohesiveness of New York's existing network of greenway trails.

Trails are overseen by the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation within the New York State Government. The 750-mile long Empire State Trail was completed in four years due to an enormous funding push from the state level.



## Final Statewide Greenway Trails Plan & Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement

April 7, 2021



## Applicability to Texas

One of the results from the statewide trail plan was the creation of an online spatial inventory of existing, planned, and proposed trails across the entire state. Codifying everything into one place, using the State as a coordinating resource, and consolidating data helps local efforts for trail planning.

Legislation enacted in November 2019 requires that the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation (OPRHP) prepare a plan to help shape future development of the State's comprehensive statewide system of non-motorized multi-use trails. Though this legislation came after the start of the Empire State Trail and the funding from the state, this mandate further committed the state of New York to continue planning, maintenance, and development of trails.

## Funding

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is supported by the State of New York's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Funds for the RTP are sourced by the Federal Highway Administration and are distributed in the following manner:

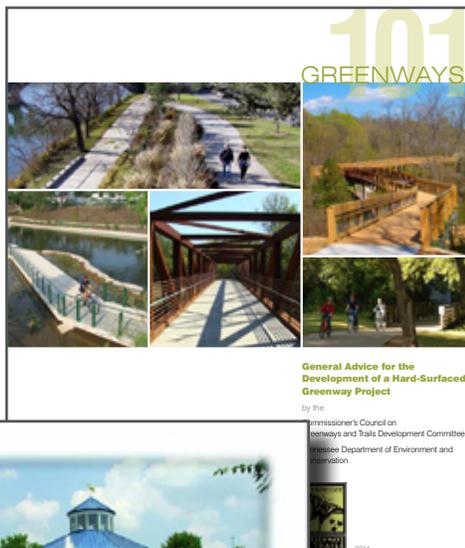
- Non-motorized trail: 30%
- Motorized trail: 30%
- Diverse recreational trail use: 40%

To complete the Empire State Trail, the New York State Legislature appropriated \$200 million of state capital funds to create the Trail. The state commitment leveraged almost \$97 million of additional funds from various federal, state, local, and private sources – providing a total program budget of \$297 million.

# TENNESSEE

In 2008, Tennessee adopted the Tennessee Greenways and Trails Plan, which is an update to the 2001 plan of the same name. The main goal of the plan was to have a greenway or trail planned in every Tennessee county by 2016.

The Greenways and Trails Program is housed within the Recreation Resources Division of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. There is a Tennessee Greenways and Trails Coordinator who oversees the program and a Commissioner's Council on Greenways and Trails. This council meets annually to assist the Greenways and Trails Program administer funding and planning for statewide trail connectivity.



## Applicability to Texas

Tennessee has started compiling a statewide GIS trail inventory and map. The goal is to use this resource to find potential trail linkages to create connectivity, identify areas of the state lacking in trails, and target revitalization opportunities.

## Funding

Trail funding is structured similarly to Texas. A majority of grant funding is derived from federal grants funneled through state agencies like the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), various metropolitan planning organizations, and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation.

### State and Federal Grants

TDOT: Transportation Alternatives Program

- Approximately \$7.5 million, 20% monetary match

TDOT: Safe Routes to Schools Program

- Approximately \$2 million, 0% match

TDOT: Multimodal Access Fund

- Approximately \$10 million, 5% monetary match

MPO: Transportation Alternatives Program & Active Transportation Program

- Approximately \$12.1 million, 20% monetary match

Local Parks and Recreation Fund

- Approximately \$3.5 million, 50% match

Recreational Trails Program

- Varies, 20% match

# TEXAS

Texas does not currently have a statewide trails plan or program; without a singular body leading trail development within Texas, trail development efforts are led at local levels. State agencies with responsibility associated to recreational trails include the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). TPWD manages trails located within State Parks and natural areas and also administers recreational trail grants to localities throughout the state. TxDOT is not directly involved in the creation or maintenance of recreational trails but provides funding for alternative transportation.

There is a biennial Texas Trails and Active Transportation Conference which brings together those involved with bicycle, pedestrian, and other active transportation and recreation modes from around Texas and the world. The conference focuses on issues of economic development, health, safety, and many other topics relevant to advancing active transportation and trails.

The Texas Statewide Trails Advisory Committee is comprised of trail advocates from across the State. Their role is to review submitted trail project proposals and provide guidance on the distribution of federal recreation trails grant funding.

The closest thing Texas has to a statewide trail planning effort is TxDOT's Bicycle Tourism Trails Study. The purpose of that study was to investigate the development of a statewide bicycle tourism trail network. The study concluded that Texans would benefit greatly from more connected bikeways across the state. The provision of bikeways can increase spending in local economies, improve the health of local residents, and improve the quality of life for all Texans. Since the completion of the Texas Bicycle Tourism Trails Study, TxDOT has incorporated the identified bicycle tourism trail network into the Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan as well as created standards and requirements for bicycle infrastructure on/along identified routes.

## Funding

National Recreational Trail Funds are administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to TPWD's Texas Statewide Trails Advisory Committee, who then provide guidance on the distribution of these funds to eligible municipalities.

The TxDOT Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program provides funding for alternative transportation projects that improve mobility for non-motorized users and mitigate congestion. Funding for this program comes from the FHWA. Funds through this program are for construction activities only, and TxDOT administers funds for areas with a population of 200,000 or less; areas with a larger population must seek this funding through the local Metropolitan Planning Organization.



# CASE STUDIES

## SUMMARY

State	Statewide Trails Plan	Major Funding Sources	Leading State Entity
Arkansas	No	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	State Parks Division of the Department of Parks and Tourism
California	Yes	FHWA, Caltrans	California Recreational Trails Committee
Florida	Yes	FHWA, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)	Office of Greenways and Trails
Georgia	No	FHWA	Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Minnesota	Yes	FHWA, Minnesota Department of Natural Resource (DNR), Minnesota Department of Transportation (DOT)	Parks and Trails Division of Minnesota DNR
New York	Yes	FHWA, New York DOT, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)	OPRHP
Tennessee	Yes	FHWA, Tennessee DOT, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC)	Department of Environment and Conservation
Texas	No	FHWA, Texas DOT, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)	TPWD

## CONSIDERATIONS APPLICABLE TO TEXAS

The following is a brief summary of components of trail planning and development from other states that might have applicability to Texas.

- Statewide Comprehensive Trails Plan (CA, FL, MN, NY, TN)
- Statewide Trails Conference & Summit (CA, GA)
- Trails Standards & Criteria (MN, CA, NY)
- Statewide Trails Inventory (NY, TN)
- Trail Town Designations (FL)





# OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEXAS

Texas has a long history of trails and Texans have expressed a strong interest in trails and trail development across the state. Despite this interest, Texas does not have a comprehensive statewide initiative to plan, develop, or coordinate trails. Nor, is there a statewide catalog or clearinghouse of trail data. A purposeful, coordinated effort towards trail planning and development of regional trails across all of Texas could attract national tourism, recognition, and the economic benefits associated with statewide trails. It is important to note that the keeper of this data will need adequate resources to compile and regularly update this database for it to remain useful.

The following opportunities can enable the State of Texas to determine a role in the coordination and planning for a statewide system of historic, scenic, and recreational trails of regional significance for Texans today and generations to come.

# NEXT STEPS

Based on best practices from other states and feedback from Texas stakeholders, the following strategic actions could be taken to further Texas’s efforts in coordinating and planning for a statewide system of trails for Texans.

## 1. STATEWIDE TRAILS INVENTORY/DATABASE

A statewide inventory or database of trails in Texas would create a foundational clearinghouse of resources for all future State, regional, and local trail planning and help support current and long-term decision-making. Similar to the Texas Water Development Board’s (TWDB) Data Hub, this inventory/database would provide a common starting point for future compilation and consistent analysis of trail-related data and information. After the establishment of a statewide inventory/data, dedicated resources are needed to ensure continual resources are allocated for its periodic update and long-term maintenance.

This resource could be leveraged to reduce inefficiencies and duplicative efforts, identify gaps in connectivity and prioritize potential critical trail linkages, target underserved areas and opportunities for revitalization, help identify and quantify the future need for funding, and support targeted tourism attraction and associated economic development efforts. This resource would also inform the development and implementation of a subsequent Texas Trails Plan.

## 2. ONLINE RESOURCES/COMMUNICATIONS

Building on the statewide inventory/database of trails, a centralized online resource for tools, communications, and assistance for trail planning and development would benefit Texans across the state, especially those in smaller communities and rural areas.

This online clearinghouse can be used for providing best practices and resources to regional and local partners regarding trail design, opportunities for technical assistance and funding, and for tourism promotion. It can also be used by everyday Texans to learn more about the health and wellness benefits of trail use and where to access local or statewide opportunities of historic, scenic, and recreational significance.



### 3. COLLABORATION AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS

The State of Texas has a long-standing history of protecting areas of state significance and providing access to them for all Texans (e.g., the Texas State Park system). Similarly, to allow access to trails for all Texans and the many benefits that come from them, the future focus on developing a network of trails across the state can benefit from collaboration and partnerships. This is a necessity in that future regional trails of significance will cross many jurisdictional boundaries and be built, managed, and maintained by numerous entities, both public and semi-public.

The following are some potential partners that could help promote, design, develop, maintain, and fund trails and who should be part of followup efforts to develop the next steps of a statewide trails system. State entities include, but are not limited to, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Historical Commission, and the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and Tourism (OEDT). Regional trail groups such as the Great Springs Project, Paso del Norte Community Foundation, Caracara Trails, the NorthEast Texas Trail Coalition, to name just a few, can help connect a statewide vision to regional and local context. Each of these entities, and others, will contribute efforts and play various roles in the future of statewide trail system. These potential roles could include:

Entity/Role	Statewide Coordination & Planning	Local Planning	Technical Design Assistance	Trail Development	Trail Operations & Maintenance	Funding	Promotion
STATE							
TPWD	●	◐	●	◐	●	●	●
TXDOT	●	◐	●	◐	●	●	●
THC	●	◐				◐	●
OEDT	◐						●
REGIONAL							
MPOs				◐		●	◐
REPRESENTATIVE: GSP, NETT, ETC.	◐	●	◐	●	●	◐	●
LOCAL / MUNICIPAL							
COUNTIES & CITIES	◐	●		●	●	●	●
QUASI-PUBLIC / PRIVATE							
REPRESENTATIVE: TPL, FOUNDATION, ETC.			◐	●		●	●

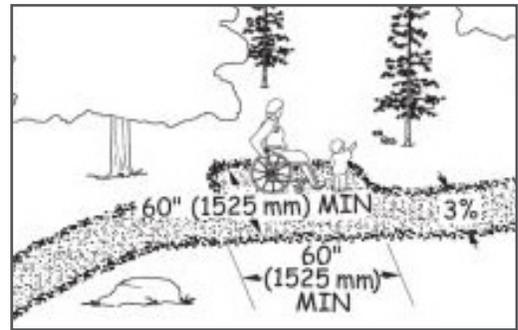
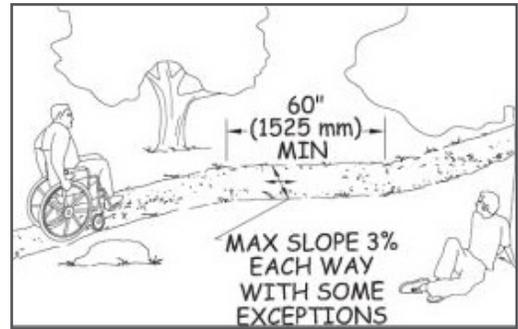
● Primary role; ◐ Support role

TPWD: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; TXDOT: Texas Department of Transportation; THC: Texas Historical Commission; TX EDT: Texas Office of Economic Development and Tourism; MPOs: Metropolitan Planning Organizations; GSP: Great Springs Project; NETT: Northeast Texas Trail Coalition; ETC includes Caracara Trails and Paso del Norte; TPL: Trust for Public Land; Foundation: misc. foundations which support trails; Etc.: Organizations including, but not limited to Water Authorities, Municipal Utility Districts, Professional Trails Builders Association, Qualified Youth Corps.

## 4. TRAIL STANDARDS/DESIGN ASSISTANCE

Trails of all shapes, sizes, and types are planned, designed, built, and maintained by various public and private entities all across the state. Development of a consistent set of guidelines and common language, whether statewide or regional, helps to define best practices and increases predictability for all stakeholders. Shared standards and specifications for general trail design would promote efficiency and consistency across the state, and help to define minimum standards for future designation of state trails of regional significance (e.g., designation and uniform branding of state interregional trail spines or corridors).

At a minimum these standards should include design guidelines for configuration, crossings, signage, accessibility, and safety features. Smaller and rural communities across Texas have reported difficulties planning and designing trails due to staffing experience and capacity. Design assistance, through direct assistance or through grants, could be provided to smaller communities and rural areas to help establish or expand a connected system of trails. Additionally, a uniform trail grading system could be developed to expand tourism and help people plan accordingly.



Source: Forest Service Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines (2013)



Source: Empire State Trail

## 5. ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF TRAILS

Tourism, in all its many forms across the state, is already among the top 10 largest economic drivers in Texas (generating \$83 billion in spending in 2019). Multiple analyses in other states and in a few areas of Texas confirm the more specific economic benefits of trails as a component of tourism, travel and leisure. A statewide effort to evaluate and estimate those economic benefits could be conducted, focusing on employment gains, opportunities for small businesses, benefits to rural and smaller communities, and the added benefit of conveying Texas’s story as a great place to live and do business. Using best practices methods, calculate the potential annual benefit to each region of the state. This effort will help inform the continued development of statewide trails connectivity across Texas.

## 6. TEXAS TRAILS PLAN

The purpose of a statewide trails plan would be to undertake a statewide assessment of trails and opportunities for the future development of trails of regional significance across Texas. This would be a first-ever statewide assessment of trails in Texas. The State has a long history of developing statewide assessments for many of its key priorities, including the State Water Plan, the Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan, and more recently, the State Flood Plan. Many of these State plans are updated on five year cycles. As highlighted in the case study section, many of Texas’ comparison states already have state trail plans.

A Texas Trails Plan could coordinate and facilitate a statewide system of trails across Texas. The Plan could utilize a strong public engagement process to define and advance a statewide connected system of historic, scenic, and recreational trails of regional significance. The study would form a critical foundation for all future trails planning and development in Texas and could be used to undertake many of the strategies identified in this report. Components of a statewide trails plan could and should include:

- A strong public engagement process
- Development of a statewide trails vision, goals, and guiding principles
- Establishment of a comprehensive inventory, geodatabase, and online mapping of existing and planned trails
- Development of a needs assessment for trail needs and opportunities
- Identification of interregional spines or corridor target network of regionally significance trails
- Establishment of criteria and standards for designated state trail corridors of regional significance
- Establishment of “Trail Towns” or similar type program to promote recreational tourism in small communities
- Identification of appropriate trail topologies for trail types and special design considerations
- Recommendations for funding opportunities, partnerships, and programs

The creation of the inaugural Texas Trails Plan could be managed through multiple types of processes. One opportunity is for the plan to be developed under the oversight of a single entity, like how the TPWD develops the TORP. Another possibility is for the plan to be developed through single-entity oversight, but with the assistance of regional sponsors and committees, like how the inaugural State Flood Plan is being developed. See Opportunity # 7 for additional information about these options.

## 7. STATEWIDE TRAILS PROGRAM

Moving forward, there are numerous decisions to determine the role and process for coordinating and facilitating a statewide system of regional trails of significance. One of the most important is the establishment of a Statewide Trails Program and designation of oversight. Using information gathered from the various state case studies, and from similar examples already being used in Texas, the following two frameworks are presented as potential models for establishing oversight over future statewide trail planning and development efforts. These include state-led and regional-sponsor oversight.

### STATE-LED MODEL

Many states have benefited from comprehensive approaches to statewide trail planning – like New York, Tennessee, and Florida. This typically takes the form of a state department or program whose sole mission is to oversee and coordinate statewide trail planning and development and a committee of stakeholders to assist the program or department.

#### ESTABLISH PROGRAM WITHIN EXISTING STATE AGENCY

This program could exist within an existing State agency such as TPWD or TxDOT. This program would oversee statewide efforts to coordinate trail planning and development, manage the online resource database, be a resource for communications with small and rural communities for assistance, coordinate state and federal funding, and coordinate development of, and updates to, the Texas Trails Plan.

#### ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

A Trail Statewide Coordinating Committee could be developed to include representation from applicable state agencies, such as members from TPWD, TxDOT, THC, the OEDT, any other applicable agency or national group, and preferably at least one member from each region from the various regional trail groups (e.g., Great Springs Project, Caracara, Paso del Norte Foundation, NETT, and others which may be created in the future). This committee could meet at least quarterly and provide support to the Statewide Trails Program.

### Example Model

The Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965 authorized the distribution of matching grants to states and local governments for statewide recreation planning. Each state is required to produce a statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) at least once every five years. In Texas, the plan is called the Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan (TORP).

Oversight over the development of the TORP is by the Recreation Grants Branch, Local Park Grants Program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the state agency that holds the authority to represent and act for the State of Texas regarding the LWCF assistance program.

The TORP goals are to:

1. Assess current statewide outdoor recreation and conservation needs and areas of concern
2. Act as a guide on how to best administer Texas' apportionment of the LWCF
3. Align with the TPWD Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan

### Benefits to Texans

- Keeps all efforts centrally-coordinated
- Maintains momentum at a high level
- Dedicates full-time staff to implementation and support of regional trail groups and entities

## REGIONAL SPONSOR MODEL

Following a model used in the Texas State Flood Plan and the State Water Plan, the State could designate regional trail planning groups (RTPGs) to help oversee trail planning issues in specific regions. These RTPGs could be overseen by regional sponsors which would have authority and oversight of trail planning and development within their region. Under this model, the State could need to take on a coordinating role to assist these groups in meeting minimum standards and in collaboration with other regions.

### ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE TRAILS COORDINATOR

A Statewide Trails Coordinator could be housed in an existing state agency involved in trail planning and development. This position could provide coordination and support to the regional sponsors, including but not limited to, managing the online resources, facilitating communication between regional sponsors and between other state entities, and assisting with statewide trails plan development.

### UTILIZE REGIONAL SPONSORS

Regional sponsors could oversee trail planning and development within their region. Each group could work to connect trails inter-regionally, provide support to other municipalities or groups pursuing trail planning and development within their region, and oversee development of statewide trails plan in coordination with the Statewide Coordinator.

## Example Model

Senate Bill 8 of the 86th Texas Legislature established a framework for the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) to institute flood planning across the state. The Texas Water Code requires that the TWDB prepare and adopt a comprehensive state flood plan every five years.

The Texas Water Code also required TWDB to designate flood planning regions, designate representatives from each region to serve as a Regional Flood Planning Group (RFPG), provide technical and financial support, and adopt guidance principles for regional and state flood planning. Local sponsor agencies were given the legal authority to conduct the procurement of professional services and enter into the contracts necessary for regional flood planning activities.

The overarching intent of the plans are to protect against the loss of life and property to:

1. Identify and reduce the risk and impact to life and property that already exists, and
2. Avoid increasing or creating new flood risk by addressing future development within the areas known to have existing or future flood risk.

The inaugural State Flood Plan process was preceded by a separate assessment which sought to better understand the state of flooding in Texas. The findings, titled State Flood Assessment – Report to the 86th Texas Legislature were used to justify the need for a comprehensive state flood planning process and the necessary funding to implement it.

## Benefits to Texans

- Builds momentum on existing grassroots efforts, while providing State support
- Delegates the implementation to the organizations and entities that are already highly involved in trail development
- Gives more ownership to local organizations and entities

## 8. FUNDING

Establishment of a Statewide Trails Program, development of a Texas Trails Plan, and resources to implement both programmatic recommendations and future trail projects requires funding.

In Texas, there are various funding programs (described on pg. 45) which allocate funding resources for trail-related facilities. There is no specific funding source focused on growing a connected statewide system of historic, scenic, and recreational trails of regional significance across Texas.

As seen in the case studies from around the U.S., many states dedicate more than only transportation funding to the development of trails. There are a variety of potential funding sources that Texas could consider including vehicle tag revenue, sale of state-owned property, lottery sales, and many more. At right, is a brief summary of some innovative funding examples from other states.

## 9. CONTINUED COORDINATION WITH REGIONAL PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS TEXAS

Engagement with potential trail partners and key stakeholders across all regions of the state should be incorporated into all of the actions and strategies discussed above. While several key groups have provided insights into these recommendations, they and many others can offer significant additional insights towards statewide trail efforts.

## Example Funding Sources from Other States

- Florida: The SUN Trail Program receives funding from an annual allocation of new vehicle tag revenues.
- Minnesota: The Regional Trail Grant program receives funding from “In Lieu Of” lottery proceeds; funding is subject to appropriation from the state legislature and signature of the governor.
- California: \$100 million annually from the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account (SB1).
- Delaware: First State Trails & Pathways Program, General Assembly allocated \$7 million within the Fiscal Year 2012 Capital Improvements Budget (the Bond Bill) to begin this work. In Fiscal Year 2013, the Bond Bill allocated \$13 million for trails and pathways.
- Montana: Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust was established by the U.S. Congress in 1998, funded by proceeds from the sale of cabin sites on Canyon Ferry Reservoir.
- Colorado: Great Outdoors Colorado is funded by Colorado Lottery proceeds and receives zero dollars from general funds or taxpayers.



# CONCLUSION

Due to the enormous size of Texas, a statewide trail network would be a great undertaking that would likely take decades to accomplish. Without a strong group guiding a coordinated effort to connect local trail systems, even large regional systems may never develop. Therefore, an opportunity exists to coordinate trail systems, planning, and development, among local and regional trail organizations. Further, a coordinated effort could create and maintain a statewide trail database, enhance communication, and foster collaborations and partnerships throughout the state. After speaking with several groups focused on regional trail connectivity, the emerging thought is that statewide trail planning could best be served by a coordinated effort to provide resources, create/maintain a statewide trail database, enhance communication, and foster collaboration.



Source: TPWD

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