



## 20 of our state parks could close this year

### Environment Texas stands up for parks in wake of severe budget cuts

From camping under the stars at Big Bend Ranch to exploring the cypress swamps of Caddo Lake, our state parks make life better here in Texas. They protect the clean water we depend on and provide a home for some of Texas' most wondrous wildlife, like the black bear and the leatherback sea turtle.

But our parks are in trouble. Due to budget cuts, as many as 20 state parks may close this year, and state grants for local parks and playgrounds were eliminated. Some parks have already had to reduce operations to just a few days a week, and after more than 96 percent of the majestic pines were lost to wildfires, Bastrop State Park desperately needs restoration funds.

#### \$150 million cut from funding

Our parks already have a dedicated funding stream—sales taxes on sporting goods—but for too long, the Legislature has raided the fund, diverting the money for other purposes and leaving just the bones for our cash-strapped parks system.

Our parks took a major blow last legislative session with a cut in funding of \$150 million. Then the drought and heat reduced visitation to our parks, pushing the budget of the parks department to the brink. The agency has had to forego critical repairs, ended interpretive programs, and scaled back conservation programs. On Sep. 1, the parks department had to end their lease of the Parrie Haynes Youth Ranch – a 4,525-acre park on the



Photo: JW Shwerman, Creative Commons

#### ▲ Davis Mountains State Park

Lampasas River with miles of horseback riding trails and ropes courses.

#### For our past and future's sake

Our goals in the coming months are to stop the parks closures by testifying in the Legislature, building a coalition of environmental groups and recreation businesses, and shining a spotlight in the media on the need to protect these treasured places.

“These places give us all a chance to experience nature, and they preserve huge pieces of Texas history,” said Mike Riffin, Environment Texas outreach director. “I can’t imagine not being able to share these places with my son or them not being available for him to share with his family. And that’s why I’m fighting for a strong public park system for years to come.”



Photo: Phil Ostroff, Creative Commons

#### more online

For more information on our work to save Texas parks visit:  
[www.EnvironmentTexas.com](http://www.EnvironmentTexas.com)

◀ Bastrop State Park, after wildfire



## To our members

On Jan. 8, the Legislature convened in Austin, commencing the biennial rollercoaster of lawmaking.

Thankfully, ongoing concern about the drought has propelled water to the top of the heap. Lawmakers will consider whether to fund the State Water Plan and whether to emphasize conservation measures over environmentally destructive new reservoirs.

Potential electric shortages have also prompted a new look at how we generate our electricity. Will we keep the lights and air conditioning running by building new fossil fuel power plants or invest in efficiency and renewables?

These, plus transportation and state parks funding, are going to keep the Legislature busy in the coming months. You can be sure we'll be there to make the environmental case and to shine the public spotlight on backroom deals.

Thanks for being with us,

Luke Metzger  
Director

## Recent action

### Applause for lifesaving soot standards

On Dec. 14, the Obama administration strengthened air quality standards for particulate matter or “soot” pollution. Soot pollution is the deadliest of the common air pollutants, causing thousands of premature deaths every year across the country through a variety of cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses. It also contributes to haze that hangs over many of Texas’ cities, towns and parks. Sources of soot pollution include power plants, diesel trucks and buses.

The strengthened standards, which were supported by Environment Texas, better reflect the latest scientific research. The new standard will outline how much soot pollution can be in the air and still be safe to breathe. Overall, soot standards were strengthened by about 20 percent. Environment Texas applauds the Obama administration for standing up for clean air.

### How to save 508 billion gallons of water

Deploying water conservation technologies and implementing conservation programs could reduce water demand by 508 billion gallons by 2020—enough to meet the municipal water needs of 9 million Texans, according to a new Environment Texas report.

Strategies such as investing in more efficient irrigation systems for agriculture, increasing the deployment of landscaping designed with plants that require far less water than traditional lawns, increasing deployment of energy technologies that require little or no water could reduce the amount of water consumed by electricity generation. Using brackish water for oil and gas drilling processes would cut the amount of new freshwater withdrawn for drilling.

As Texas’ population and economy continue to grow, water resources will become increasingly scarce, making it more important than ever to use water wisely.

“I don’t even have to say why water is so important in Texas,” said Director Luke Metzger. “Anything and everything we can do to conserve it should be done.”

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▲ Drought-stricken Nacogdoches Lake

Photo: Jeff Attaway, Creative Commons



# Wind power for a cleaner, greener Texas

In January, President Obama signed into law a bill that extends key tax credits for wind power and averts the “fiscal cliff.”

The main federal incentives for wind power—the renewable energy Production Tax Credit (PTC) and the offshore wind Investment Tax Credit (ITC)—had expired on Dec. 31, 2012, but the new law will now be available for wind power projects that start construction over the next year, allowing for continued growth of wind power in Texas and the U.S.

“We applaud our leaders for recognizing these tremendous benefits to our health and environment, and for acting to ensure the continued development of pollution-free wind energy,” said State Director Luke Metzger.

## Enough water for 130,800 Texans

With 80 percent of Texas in drought at press time, a November Environment Texas Research and Policy Center report, “Wind Power for a Cleaner America: Reducing Global Warming Pollution, Cutting Air Pollution, and Saving Water,” calculated that Texas’ current power generation from wind energy saves enough water to meet the needs of 130,800 Texans, about the population of Waco or Killeen.

Wind and other renewable energies are typically less water intensive than coal-fired power plants or fracking operations.

And as Hurricane Sandy and its aftermath prompts more Texans to call for action to tackle global warming and the rise in extreme weather, the report also found that Texas wind energy displaces as much global warming pollution as taking 3,334,000 cars off the road per year.

## Like taking 13 million cars off the road

Nationally, wind energy currently saves more than enough water nationwide to meet the needs of a city the size of Boston, and there is still plenty of room for growth.

America has more than doubled its use of wind power since the beginning of 2008. National wind energy now displaces about as much global warming pollution each year as is produced by 13 million cars.

## We’re number one

Wind energy now provides 9 percent of Texas’ electricity making Texas the number one wind producer in the country. If wind development continues at a pace comparable to that of recent years through 2016, Texas would reduce global warming pollution by as much as taking nearly an additional 2.2 million cars off the road. It would also save enough water to meet the needs of an additional 89,800 Texans.

The report also outlined that today’s wind energy in Texas is delivering results for public health, by avoiding 16,780 tons of smog-causing pollution and 22,990 tons of soot pollution.

“As our state is still healing from severe drought, we must invest wisely in a future with cleaner air, fewer extreme weather events and smart use of our water resources,” said Metzger. “We can’t afford to wait any longer to transition to clean, renewable energy. Now is the time.”



Wind Power for a Cleaner America

more online 

Read the full report online at:  
[www.EnvironmentTexasCenter.org](http://www.EnvironmentTexasCenter.org)



Photo: davis.senate.state.tx.us

## Interview: Senator Wendy Davis

First elected in 2008, Sen. Wendy Davis (Fort Worth) is now serving her second term in the Texas Senate.

*What can be done about Texas air quality?*

First, we are not adequately investing in our state’s infrastructure to lessen traffic congestion as our state grows. We know that auto exhaust is one of the biggest enemies of cleaning our air, and until we can ease congestion, we won’t resolve air quality problems.

Second, we have funds that are designed to address air quality problems through the TERP—or Texas Emissions Reduction Plan. But Rick Perry and Austin leaders continue to use these dedicated funds to artificially balance the state’s budget. It remains to be seen whether the Legislature will release these funds, but until they do, our community’s air quality and health will suffer.

*You’ve also been active on issues related to fracking. Tell us about it.*

I met with countless people in our communities and held a summit with representatives of the gas drilling industry to develop a balanced legislative agenda. I worked with Texas Department of Transportation to get more air monitors installed in Tarrant County. I supported legislation creating a process by which gas drilling companies report their usage of fracking fluids and other chemicals.

815 Brazos, Ste. 600  
Austin, TX 78701  
(512) 479-0388

# Environment Texas

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## Environment Texas

### Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Texas. We focus exclusively on protecting Texas' air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

## Fire and more emissions at Exxon's Baytown

In late December and early January, ExxonMobil's Baytown facility reported four large unauthorized emissions of harmful air pollutants into the surrounding neighborhoods east of Houston. In one "emission event," the company released 57 tons of sulfur dioxide, a respiratory irritant. In another, the facility released one ton of the human carcinogens benzene and 1,3-butadiene into the air. And in October, a huge fire broke out, caused by a hole in a reactor.

Since late 2005, ExxonMobil's Baytown complex has emitted more than 9 million pounds of air pollutants during 333 reported emission events. The ExxonMobil refinery is subject to a lawsuit by Environment Texas that could go to trial this spring.

"These kinds of events are exactly why we are going to court with Exxon," said Luke Metzger, director of Environment Texas. "This is unacceptable, not to mention dangerous for all of us."



Photo: KHOU 11

### more inside

*Growing wind power in Texas; an interview with Sen. Wendy Davis; 20 state parks poised to close; and more.*

◀ *An Oct. 3, 2012 fire at ExxonMobil's Baytown Facility*