We need more nature in our lives, more space for recreation, and more space for wildlife to roam. Voters in Hays County agree—and nearly 70 percent of them voted to adopt Proposition A. Known as the “Hays 2020 Parks Bond,” Prop. A earmarks $75 million to create and expand parks to meet recreational demands and protect natural areas threatened by development.

The vote comes at a critical juncture for the county’s wild spaces. Hays County is one of the fastest-growing areas in the United States, and these new investments will help preserve cherished wild places from encroaching development.

The passage of this measure comes amidst the ongoing pandemic, which has seen record numbers of people turning to wild and natural spaces to find a sense of calm as well as opportunities to enjoy the outdoors while maintaining a safe social distance.

Prop. A also includes bond funding for 16 projects, ranging from urban parks used for recreation to natural habitats that are critical for wildlife conservation. The projects that Hays County has voted to fund include the preservation of Coleman’s Canyon, home to Wimberley Bat Cave and a water source for Jacob’s Well. The measure will also protect land near the San Marcos River, allocate funding for a new nature center at Blue Hole Park, and ensure safeguards for the Golden-cheeked Warbler’s habitat. Plus, it adds an additional 14 miles to the Violet Crown Trail—the first regional trail system in Central Texas.

The projects were recommended by the Parks and Open Spaces Advisory Committee and were selected due to their unique attributes.

Continued on page 3

Environment Texas will continue to protect the wild places we love and the wildlife that depend on them.
‘The Fierce Urgency of Fire’: Environment America Research & Policy Center hosts webinar on vital climate actions

If you’re worried about extreme weather events, you’re certainly not alone.

On Sept. 22, our national research partner, Environment America Research & Policy Center, hosted a webinar called “The Fierce Urgency of Fire” to discuss how wildfires, hurricanes and other extreme weather events underscore the urgent need for climate action. More than 100 people watched the presentation.

“Any time that you’re faced with a huge problem, like how do we break our country and our planet’s addiction to fossil fuels and decouple everything from that, it’s a massive undertaking,” said Johanna Neumann, senior director of our national network’s Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy.

“Let’s make bold steps on solar, let’s make bold steps on wind, secure that progress and then do it again.

Houston takes two steps toward becoming a more walkable city

In a car-centric city surrounded by gas and oil facilities, Houston leaders took steps to leave its dirty transportation reputation in the dust.

On Aug. 5, the Houston City Council unanimously passed two ordinances that prioritize sustainable travel infrastructure, privileging the city’s walkability above the fossil fuel-dependent travel that currently dominates the area. The ordinances will establish the “Walkable Places” and “Transit-Oriented Development” programs, which will create pedestrian-friendly development and improve walkability on streets near public transportation stations.

“As a coastal city that’s already weathered severe weather and storms, Houston is at the forefront of climate change,” wrote Environment Texas Clean Air Associate Catherine Fraser. “Shifting Houston’s car-centric culture to a more pedestrian-friendly one creates both public health and environmental benefits for the city.”

This victory comes on the heels of the METRONext ballot measure, which passed and secured a $3.5 billion public transportation investment in Houston last fall, advancing Environment Texas’ goal of cleaner transportation.

Environment Texas joins lawsuit challenging the Trump administration’s push to drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

One of the Trump administration’s last actions could end up spoiling one of America’s last great wild places. We took action to save it.

On Aug. 24, Environment Texas, a coalition of environmental organizations, and the Gwich’in Steering Committee sued the administration over its plans to begin an oil and gas leasing program in Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Home to polar bears, wolves, herds of caribou and more than 200 species of migratory birds, the refuge has been in the crosshairs of fossil fuel companies for decades.

“The Trump administration’s plan threatens one of the world’s most untamed wildlife areas and ignores the reality that extracting fossil fuels from the ground is a fool’s errand when clean, renewable energy is on the rise,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director for our national network’s Conservation Program.

The suit alleges that the government’s decision violates several federal statutes, including the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Get more updates on our work online at http://environmenttexas.org.
To support this effort, Hays County created a website with a “story map” that provides information on each specific project and the ways it could benefit citizens. The map demonstrates how each project would aid water quality protection and outlines ways the public could utilize each space.

The map also addresses one of nature’s most pressing issues: species extinction. It shows users how the proposition would protect endangered species. This conservation effort couldn’t come at a better time for endangered species, as scientists warn we’re in the middle of a “sixth mass extinction.” Now, Hays County has taken meaningful steps toward preserving its natural spaces and species.

This effort is bigger than Hays County, though—it’s even bigger than Texas.

We live in a world of incredible material abundance, but we’re running short on nature. Our country is losing two football field’s worth of forest, meadow, grassland, desert, beachfront or wetland to human development every single minute.

Right now, there’s a movement afoot to set aside half the earth for nature to thrive. The first step is to protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.

It’s a bold vision, and achieving it will require lots of smaller victories along the way at the local, county, state and national levels.

So, while the voters of Hays County weren’t voting on a 30 percent by 2030 goal per se, they were voting to protect more nature, and, with more victories like this, we’ll get there. Kudos to Hays County.

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Thank you for supporting and sustaining our work—still done at a safe social distance—to keep our air and water clean, to defend our public lands, and to protect our climate and environment for future generations.

Your action and support allows us to keep up the work you’ll read about in these pages. Thank you for standing with us.

Luke Metzger
Executive Director

Across the country, conservationists are pushing to preserve more natural land in order to protect our wildlife, and, ultimately, stave off some of the worst consequences of climate change.
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is letting companies off the hook for their pollution during the coronavirus pandemic, and so far, 25 facilities in Texas are taking advantage.

Last March, the EPA announced a policy suspending enforcement of critical environmental laws during the pandemic. Since then, this “pandemic polluter loophole” has allowed oil and gas facilities, mineral and coal mines, and chemical facilities—25 in Texas alone—to stop monitoring and reporting their pollution, nullifying the protective measures that the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act ensure.

“Our bedrock environmental laws, such as the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, rely on companies to regularly monitor and report their own pollution,” writes Catherine Fraser, clean air associate with Environment Texas Research & Policy Center.

Environment Texas Research & Policy Center and our national network called on the EPA to close the loophole, which it did last June.