

Texas Wildlife Association

"Working for tomorrow's wildlife ... TODAY!"

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Testimony on the Draft 2007 State Water Plan

**Presented to the
Texas Water Development Board**

**Presented by
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**September 19, 2006
San Antonio**

The Texas Wildlife Association is a non-profit organization representing private land stewards, land managers, hunters and anglers from across the state of Texas. Our members care for and control almost 40 million acres of rangeland and wildlife habitat that are key components of Texas' upstream rural water catchments. The involvement of private land stewards is critical in establishing Texas' long-term water policies.

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Mr. Chairman and esteemed board members, the Texas Wildlife Association appreciates the opportunity to add our comments to this vital discussion that will shape Texas water policy for the next five years and beyond.

On behalf of the land stewards of Texas, thank you for taking on this vital conservation leadership role. As you know better than anyone, you've undertaken a difficult task – balancing the needs of a diverse, growing population against the well-being of our most important natural resource: water. The plan that you have put together offers some intriguing ideas, and many carry substantial price tags. While there are definite needs for additional reservoirs, pipelines and other engineered solutions, the plan overlooks a simple, foundation solution: voluntary land stewardship.

Responsible, voluntary land management (including brush control) gets a cursory mention in the current plan; but, as it is written, the plan does not *adequately* address the role that effective land stewardship can play in improving the long-term quality and quantity of our water supplies. It is a common, but ill-advised omission.

Responsible, effective voluntary land stewardship remains Texas' untapped water management resource. But we believe this inexpensive, low-tech, common-sense approach should be the foundation for Texas' water policy if we are serious about improving the quantity and the quality of water available to all its inhabitants. If we are to be successful in creating sustainable water supplies, it is imperative that effective, voluntary land stewardship be included in local, regional and state-level water policy – now and forever.

Why?

I believe that Lyndon B. Johnson answers that question best. In 1947, before the catastrophic drought of the 1950s parched the landscape, he observed, "Saving the water and the soil must start where the first raindrop falls."

Before Lyndon B. Johnson was a politician, he was a child of the land. Growing up in the Texas Hill Country amid grazing goats, sheep, cattle and sparkling, clear springs, he inherently understood the relationship between sky, land and water. Like most Texans, LBJ felt a strong kinship to the land, because, since the days of the Republic, our lives and livelihoods have been shaped by the diverse landscape that characterizes our home.

In recent years though, fewer people have enjoyed the benefits of growing up on the land. Farms and ranches have given way to cities and suburbs, severing the direct, physical ties to the land and nature's cycles. Consequently, a lack of understanding of about the interrelationship between land and water has developed in our state. Reading this plan, the results of this lack of understanding become obvious: the authors reach for the familiar, but expensive strategies of engineering, as opposed to embracing efficient measures that maximize the power of Mother Nature.

Ground and surface water supplies originate with the rain that falls on the land and is captured by complex, large-scale ecological processes involving many variables including plants, animals, soils, and geology. When these processes function optimally, floods are reduced, aquifers are replenished, and water is released more slowly and steadily into springs, streams, rivers, lakes and eventually our bays and estuaries. If the land is healthy, the quality and quantity of water – both surface and groundwater – available to our citizens reflects that condition. When the natural processes are working well across millions of acres of open, rural land, the contribution to the state's water supply can be tremendous, "creating" more water for all Texans.

Moreover, when conscientious land stewards ably manage their resources (as they do every day), they are ranching water just as surely as they are ranching cattle or wildlife. Unfortunately, this contribution is often overlooked or misunderstood. Well-managed land is the greatest water supply-enhancement device on the planet. With adequate and appropriate vegetative cover, land is Mother Nature's sponge. In Texas, open space land covers almost 150 million acres. A sponge of this magnitude cannot be overlooked when the objective is making the most of every drop that falls from the sky.

We must include voluntary land stewardship – on a grand scale – as one of the cornerstone solutions for water issues in Texas because it is complementary, cost-effective, sustainable, efficient, environmentally sensitive, multi-faceted and governable. By harnessing the power of the free market and providing incentives to private landowners, we can help ensure that these land stewards continue to voluntarily do good things for water in Texas. Their efforts are vitally important because the presence of voluntary land stewardship – enhancing the catchment and supply-enhancement power of the land – helps maximize the effectiveness of all other water management strategies.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, voluntary land stewardship allows policy makers and water managers to consider water at its origins, not just at its destination. The only way Texas' water policy will be truly comprehensive is when supply – where the first raindrop falls on the land – is emphasized in policy with the same degree of enthusiastic intensity as demand.

Right now, you board members and all other water policy-makers, have the opportunity to include and recommend voluntary land stewardship in the State Water Plan. Please act wisely for the benefit of all Texans. The decision is yours, but the ramifications affect us all. We simply must recognize voluntary land stewardship's untapped potential.