

**... Conservation Story**

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wildlife management areas covering 769,686 acres, almost all created with WSFR federal funds. Each represents a unique ecological region for that part of the state. They serve as research and demonstration areas showcasing best practices to thousands of ranchers and other landowners, and they also offer public hunting, fishing, camping, birding and the like.

Following the devastating 1950s drought, a boom of reservoir development in the 1960s splashed new "lakes" with big surface acreage across the state. Fisheries managers saw a chance to provide quality fishing opportunities in new warm water habitats. The Sport Fish Restoration Program was instrumental in turning the Texas reservoir system into a freshwater fishing mecca and economic powerhouse.

WSFR funds have paid for biologists and resources needed to create and develop freshwater fisheries through innovative fishing regulations, fish stockings, and fish habitat improvements. Today,

these provide opportunities for more than 1.85 million anglers who spend 27 million days fishing in Texas each year. Freshwater anglers generate \$2.38 billion dollars in annual retail sales and support more than 33,000 jobs across the state.

Throughout the 1980s, virtually all the Sport Fish Restoration funds for Texas were used to construct new fish hatcheries and renovate older dilapidated ones. Tens of millions of dollars flowed to renovate the Dundee, Possum Kingdom, A.E. Wood, and CCA Marine Development Center hatcheries. In the 1990's Sea Center Texas and the Texas Freshwater Fishing Center came on line. These unique facilities blended research and production with visitor aquaria and youth fishing ponds. Today, the hatchery stocking program is integrated into the state's overall fisheries management program.

The "Redfish Wars" era in Texas showcases the value of WSFR to address big problems. After commercial fishing sent red drum stocks to alarming lows, H.B. 100 (the state "redfish bill") in 1981

designated red drum and spotted sea trout as game fish and prohibited their sale. It fell to state hatcheries, built with WSFR dollars, to bring back these severely depleted stocks. From 1983-2011, hatcheries released 624 million red drum and 65 million spotted sea trout fish fingerlings. These huge production numbers, combined with science-based bag limits and other regulations, have brought both fish back to record abundance today.

What about encouraging safe, legal and ethical hunting, boating and fishing? Without WSFR, there would be no Texas hunter, boater and angler education programs. Over 50,000 people were introduced to fishing in 2011 thanks to Texas angler education. Since 1972, nearly

1 million youth and adults have been trained in hunter education, dropping the number of Texas hunting accidents and fatalities to an all-time low in 2011, to about one accident per 24,000 licenses holders.

Clearly, WSFR means more than healthy lands and waters, or abundant fish and wildlife. It means a higher quality of life for people, and in some cases it means lives saved. One conservation leader who helped create WSFR put it this way:

"...I feel that the high tension at which the average man has been living is wrecking entirely too many nervous systems. Hunting and fishing is the best nerve tonic I know, and I believe that a greater opportunity for the average citizen to engage

in this type of outdoor recreation would greatly promote both the health and happiness of our people."

A. Willis Robertson wrote those words in 1932. They still ring true in 2012.

So, if you buy hunting or fishing equipment, stand tall and proud knowing what 75 years of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding has done for fish and wildlife conservation across America. As the national 75th anniversary commemoration effort says: "It's your nature."

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