

Texas Parks and Wildlife turns 50 this year

Agency Calls for Texans to Share Stories, Photos, become Ambassadors for the Future

In the late summer of 1963, the most popular show on television was "The Beverly Hillbillies," a gallon of gas cost 29 cents, the University of Texas Longhorns were headed toward their first national football championship, "My Boyfriend's Back" was the top hit on AM radio and Texas had a new state agency called the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Earlier that year, Texas lawmakers had begun consideration of House Bill 21, introduced by Weatherford State Rep. James M. Cotton, an attorney descended from a Parker County pioneer. The measure, called for by Gov. John B. Connally as part of his campaign to modernize state government, would merge the Game and Fish Commission with the State Parks Board to create a new agency dedicated to conservation, parks and outdoor recreation. The final bill passed in the Senate in early April and Connally later signed it into law with an effective date of Aug. 23.

This year, TPWD will mark its 50th anniversary using technology not even imagined in 1963. The department has set up a 50th anniversary web page at www.lifesbetteroutside.org where people can share stories and photos about their memorable moments in the Texas outdoors, and thereby inspire others to enjoy nature.

While online, the agency

hopes people will sign up to become a Texas Parks and Wildlife ambassador and pledge to do things like visit state parks, take a kid hunting or fishing, and watch and share a video showcasing what's made life better outside in Texas.

"With all the bounty and beauty of our natural places, our parks, our wildlife, and with everything that's at stake in our state today, we are excited about our 50th birthday," said TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith, "but we don't want it to be all about us, and we want to look to the future as we celebrate our past."

While acknowledging the many contributions of former and current TPWD employees, Smith says the agency wants the half-century celebration to focus on the people who support the department, and to inspire a new generation of supporters.

"We're a successful organization in large part because of those who support us," Smith said, "and we can't fulfill our mission without help. If you love wildlife and parks, step up to be a TPWD ambassador and join us in shaping the Texas outdoors we want to see in the next 50 years."


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