



SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION IN TEXAS

**BUSH SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND
PUBLIC SERVICE**

2019-2020 Consulting Capstone

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Second, we would like to thank all of those who participated in our survey. While we have elected to maintain the anonymity of survey participants, we would like to acknowledge that we could not have completed this capstone without them. Their responses provided us with the much-needed data regarding what funding methods Texans think are appropriate to conserve our unique ecosystem. In many ways, they are this project's unsung heroes.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the work that each group member contributed to this project. Everyone was a team player and dedicated to the task at hand. It says a lot when a team can work and learn together while also sharing many laughs. We are all proud of this finished product and cherish the fun we had throughout the year.



Project Overview

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The consulting capstone team sought to find a self-sustaining, fair, and viable revenue source that can be established and implemented to generate \$20 million for wildlife and habitat conservation in Texas. The team studied several possible funding mechanisms and the potential support they would receive by comparing survey responses of local governments with those of conservation organizations. We surveyed Councils of Governments (COGs) to assess attitudes of local government because the councils are composed of elected officials from regional governments in Texas. We surveyed members of America’s Fish and Wildlife Alliance to assess attitudes of conservation organizations because the Texas Alliance has endorsed HR 3742 Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, which is under consideration in the 116th Congress (2019-2020). The conservation group served as a control with a positive bias for funding conservation whereas the COGs represented the voting public.

The surveys provided to each group asked respondents to rank wildlife funding methods on the basis of equitability, practicality, and long-term viability. Initial analysis indicates that in terms of practicality, long-term viability, and equitability, Alliance members and Councils of Governments ranked vehicle registration second highest.

THE MISSION

The capstone team seeks to find an alternative, self-sustaining, and viable revenue source that can generate \$20 million to fund conservation of wildlife and habitat in Texas.

THE CLIENT

Dr. Perry Barboza – Boone & Crockett Club Chair. The Boone & Crockett Wildlife James H. “Red” Duke Wildlife Conservation and Policy Program at Texas A&M University is part of the University Programs conducted by the Boone & Crockett Club. The Club was established in 1887 with the mission to conserve wildlife and their habitats. Dr. Barboza is a professional member of the Boone & Crockett Club and the leader of their endowed program at Texas A&M. Throughout the project, Dr. Barboza has provided insight and guidance to the capstone team. He assisted the team by acting as a liaison between The Boone & Crockett Club and the Capstone group. Additionally, Dr. Barboza has been essential in helping the capstone team frame research questions, develop the survey, and ensure reports are prepared for stakeholders.

ADVISOR

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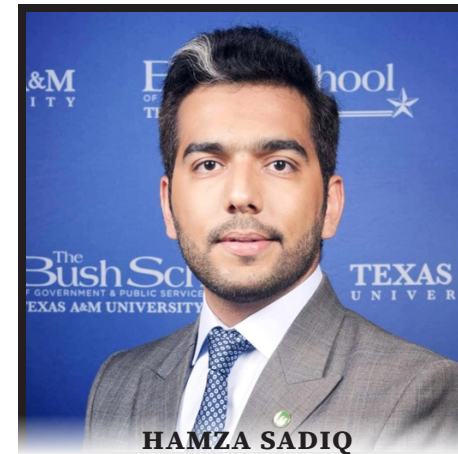
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Executive Summary

PROJECT SUMMARY

Texas has an estimated need of \$20 million in non-federal funding in order to receive \$60 million in federal funding from the proposed Recovering America's Wildlife Act. The purpose of this report is to analyze and present potential methods to fund wildlife conservation based on the criteria of feasibility and sustainability. By exploring Texas's political culture and surveying stakeholders, we gained an understanding of the best, possible funding options to raise the funds needed to receive the federal match.

BACKGROUND

Conservation in the state of Texas has traditionally relied on a steadily deteriorating user-pay system where hunters and anglers fund conservation through the purchase of licenses. The Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 and the Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950 ushered in a new era of wildlife conservation in which the federal government provided matching funds for State conservation actions by collecting an excise tax on goods used for hunting or fishing.

The current user-pay system, however, has not fared well over time. Conservation initiatives and efforts in Texas—and therefore, expenses—are increasing at a rapid rate. This is a rate at which the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson

Acts can no longer keep up with monetarily.

First introduced during the 115th Congressional session in 2017 and 2018, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA), also known as H.R. 3742, aims to amend the Pittman-Robertson Act to make approximately \$1.3B available for management of fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need as determined by State fish and wildlife agencies, and for other purposes. If passed, H.R.3742 will match federal funds with State funds at a rate of three to one for species and projects that are not associated with license revenues to the State. The states' matching funds must be secured from sources other than from federal funding indicating the need for each state to obtain new sources for funding wildlife conservation.

PROCESS

Our 2019/20 Capstone team expanded upon the 2018/19 Capstone project. We also measured public perceptions of potential funding mechanisms, but chose to use Councils of Governments as the experimental group instead of Chambers of Commerce, because response rates from the latter group were low in 2018/19. The Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife members served as the control for our project. Alliance members are groups that have publicly pledged their support for RAWA. For the purpose of this project, we assumed that

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they would be supportive of a mechanism to fund conservation in Texas. Surveys were sent to Councils of Governments and Alliance members to determine the most equitable, viable, and practical method to fund conservation. Potential funding mechanisms were:

- Aircraft take-off and landing fee
- Aircraft gas tax
- Vehicle title fee
- Vehicle inspection fee
- Vehicle registration fee
- Increase in sporting goods tax
- LLC fee
- Wildlife conservation/Green fund
- Carbon emissions tax or fine
- National income tax

RESULTS

We received a survey response rate of 32% (45 of 140) from Alliance members and 42% from COGs (10 of 24). The Alliance favored the following solutions: state/federal tax revenue, environmental pollution fine, charge on oil and gas, and hunting and fishing fees. COG favored hunting and fishing fees, environmental pollution fee, and private partnership. We used population density to weight COG scores to assess the response of a representative vote (proportional representation) that provided less weight to less populous rural COGs and more weight to urban COGs. Weighted results indicated less support for hunting and fishing fees, environmental pollution fee, and private partnership than the unweighted scores.

When comparing support in terms of equity, long-term viability, and practicality, sporting goods tax and the vehicle registration fee the most support from both Alliance members and

COGs. The wildlife conservation fund survey section had three questions ranging from general to more specific funding options. Overall, COGs and Alliance groups were slightly in favor of a public fund dedicated to conversation over a private fund.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information from the 2018/2019 Capstone report and our findings through our own survey, we recommend a vehicle registration fee to expand conservation funding in Texas. In terms of practicality, long-term viability, and equitability, Alliance members and COGs ranked vehicle registration second highest. Our findings are also supported by the 2018/2019 survey of chambers of commerce. An additional \$1 fee on all vehicle registrations in Texas would yield the desired \$20 million annually. Furthermore, the framework for adding an additional fee to vehicle registration will encounter the least number of barriers because the Texas legislature already has a system in place to impose fees on registrations. When considering the short turnaround that the Texas legislature needs the funding to get the match for RAWA, vehicle registration is the best avenue to raise \$20 million annually to support conservation. This method is also believed to be the most sustainable for the future because private transportation will continue even as multimodal public transportation continues to develop in the State (TDOT, 2020).

While vehicle title and inspection fees scored similarly, this mechanism is not recommended. Since these fees are not annually recurring, they do not produce as high of a yield as vehicle registration fees. Additionally, the future

of required vehicle inspections in Texas is uncertain because mandatory testing has been discontinued in other states.

Although the sporting goods tax scored the highest on the survey, the group does not recommend advocating for an increase in the tax. The 2019 passage of Proposition 5 in the Texas legislature dedicated all allocated revenue from the sales tax on sporting goods to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission. This funding avenue is not likely to be expanded, so it is not recommended the sales tax on sporting goods be further altered. While it could be expanded by increasing the allocation from the comptroller, an increase in the price of goods could result.

Ultimately, this would reduce sales and thus, revenues in Texas.

A more long-term solution could lie in the development of a wildlife fund. COGs and Alliance groups both scored this as a favorable potential funding mechanism. However, the time it would take to establish such a fund combined with determining logistics and investors, makes this an option better suited for the future by following established funding mechanisms for water development and transportation in Texas. Therefore, it is recommended Texas proceed with implementing a \$1 fee on vehicle registrations and consider the future establishment of a wildlife fund.

Literature Review

LEGISLATION SUPPORTING CONSERVATION

The North American Model of conservation is a theoretical model that considers hunting to be a crucial element in wildlife conservation and management efforts (Peterson, 2014). It views hunters and anglers as the saviors of wildlife and emphasizes the importance of acquiring protected areas to fund and conserve wildlife (Peterson, 2014). The North American Model has served as the framework for United States legislation supporting conservation funding efforts by establishing the user-pay, public benefit system.

Key Contemporary Development: Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA)

Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) or H.R. 3742 is the most recent legislative proposal for federal funding in the United States. RAWA aims to prevent species from becoming "threatened or endangered" by funding restoration efforts proposed in State Wildlife Action Plans including the Texas Conservation Action Plan (2012). RAWA serves as a legislative amendment to the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make \$1.3 billion available in annual funding to assist states and territories in proactive, collaborative efforts to restore essential habitats and implement key

conservation strategies (H.R. 3742, 2019).

According to The Wildlife Society (2018), RAWA seeks to:

- "Implement the ideas of the Blue-Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources to address the financial needs associated with keeping species from facing costly emergency conservation measures down the road;
- Provide \$1.3 billion in dedicated funding annually for the implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans;
- Provide \$97.5 million in dedicated funding annually for tribal agencies to work on recovering at-risk species;
- Leverage funds from state agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations to boost the power of federal conservation spending;
- Provide greater regulatory certainty for industry and private partners by conserving species and avoiding the need to list them under the Endangered Species Act; and
- Empower wildlife professionals to hold the nation's wildlife in the public trust for generations to come by providing state and tribal agencies with the flexibility to conserve populations in an effective and cost-efficient manner."

While RAWA can help mitigate wildlife management costs for states, each state must match federal funds at a three-to-one ratio. This legislation has demonstrated a rational comprehensive planning model and an integrative power network, both of which are essential pieces for community and economic growth (Obenour & Cooper, 2010). The Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife has been RAWA's most staunch advocate in Texas. The Alliance comprises 142 organizations ranging

from national and state entities to local retail shops and ranches (Mento, 2020).

Pitman Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts

Towards the final years of the nineteenth-century, the decline in wildlife and habitats became a legitimate concern, particularly for Theodore Roosevelt and the Boone & Crockett Club. Members pledged to promote hunting as a sport, to conserve big game populations and their habitats, and to promote conservation legislation (Mahoney, 2019, p. 60). Efforts among this cohort of conservationists led to the passage of the most significant legislation in wildlife conservation history: the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 implemented by the Administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Pittman-Robertson Act placed an excise tax on guns, ammunition, and hunting equipment, financially complimenting the earlier mandated purchase of hunting licenses (16 U.S.C. 669-669i; 50 Stat. 917). Thus, the Act normalized the user-pay system across all states to fund American conservation. Federal legislation sets a level playing field in conservation by providing funds for poor states to enact legislation and police use of wildlife that they could not otherwise afford.

The user-pay model was expanded in 1950 with the Dingell-Johnson Act (16 U.S.C. § 777) by extending the excise tax to fishing equipment, motorboats, and small engine fuel (16 U.S.C. § 777) Both the Pittman-Robertson Act and Dingell-Johnson Act funded restoration of America's wild game, such as elk, turkey, deer, waterfowl and sport fish such as trout and bass (King, 2018). The success of this legislation is due to dedicated, sustained and fair funding. First, the tax revenue is dedicated to conservation efforts and cannot be reallocated. The tax is sustained by goods that are

LITERATURE REVIEW

regularly purchased and used to experience the outdoors. Finally, hunters and anglers have been staunch supporters of a fair user-pay system. This system, however, has not fared well over time. While the users of wildlife still represent conservation's largest funding source, the user-pay model is growing increasingly inadequate. The overall proportion of users is dwindling while costs are not. It is no secret that those who simply benefit from conservation far outnumber those who actually use and pay for the wildlife. When considering hunters and anglers as a percentage of the overall population, the proportion of hunters and fishers is declining but the population is growing (Larson et al., 2013). Although the absolute number of hunters and fishers is actually increasing (Larson et al., 2013; Wildlife Management Institute, 2018), funding for conservation is not growing as rapidly as the demand for conservation projects.

Budget Implications

In Texas, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs are managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). TPWD is responsible for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife in Texas (Legislative Budget Board, 2017). The budget for TPWD is based on obligated funds and discretionary funds. Federal support from the Wildlife and Sport Fish programs are obligated for conservation and account for 17% (\$72.7M) of the budget for TPWD (TPWD, 2019). In 1993, the Texas legislature approved a law appropriating excise tax revenue on sporting goods to Texas' state parks. However, on average, only 40% of that revenue was used for conservation (Anchondo, 2019). Therefore, in 2019 Texas passed a constitutional amendment, Proposition 5, which aimed to ensure that the sporting goods tax revenues are fully directed toward Texas parks and historical sites. Revenues from State licenses for hunting and fishing (Game,

Fish and Water Safety - Fund 9) are also allocated for conservation purposes and account for 31% of the budget (TPWD, 2019). However, 35% (General Revenue - Fund 1) is from discretionary funds that are mainly derived from an allocation of sales tax revenues attributed to sporting goods sales in Texas (TPWD, 2019). The issue with General Revenue - Fund 1 is that the source is neither dedicated nor specified, coming from unclaimed refunds of motorboat fuel taxes and other specific general revenue streams (TPWD, 2019). Fortunately, the State has increased the allocation of this discretionary fund to TPWD over the last 10 years to match the growing need for conservation funding in the State.

The \$20 million match to RAWA is allocated to TPWD's Game Fish and Water Safety Account (Account 009), where federal funds accumulate and combine with current State funding methods such as license, stamp, and boat registration/titling fees (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2019). Account 009 is 31% of the annual TPWD budget, which includes matches from the Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration programs (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; Legislative Budget Board, 2017). For FY 2019, Account 009 totaled \$203.9 million and is allowable for fisheries and wildlife management and conservation activities with a particular focus on game and fish laws (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department). A non-game species conservation fund exists as Account 506 of the TPWD annual budget, but is variable based on revenue from private grants and donations, with limited assistance from State allocations (including flow through money from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund) and minor federal allocations (TPWD, 2019).

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STAKEHOLDER VALUES, BELIEFS, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD CONSERVATION IN TEXAS

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), several key nonprofit organizations, and private landowners all hold a stake in the future of conservation funding and practices. Environmental nonprofits in Texas often implement their own programs to protect some species when populations or their habitats are threatened. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), for example, purchased more than 2,000 acres in the Bahia Grande Area of South Texas for nearly \$5 million to protect the critically endangered ocelot and its habitat (McGuire, 2017, n.p.).

Many conservation efforts would not be possible without the support of private landowners. More

than 95% of Texas land is privately owned, so the willingness of landowners to participate in conservation efforts is crucial. Fortunately, many of them are willing to help. According to the Environmental Defense Fund (2018), many private landowners feel responsible for the protection and conservation of Texas wildlife.

Traditionally, hunters and anglers have primarily supported conservation through the purchase of licenses and outdoor equipment and advocacy. Now, individuals who are not avid hunters and fishers are openly asking for opportunities to allow them to contribute to conservation efforts (Anchondo, 2019). A recent report entitled Nature of Americans by Dr. Stephan Kellert (2017) of Yale University found that Texans today are more disconnected from nature even though they highly value nature and are willing to "support nature-related programming, funding, and conservation"



LITERATURE REVIEW

(Kellert et al., 2017, p.4). Values shape people's attitudes toward issues that subsequently drive the action and behaviors of individuals and groups (Jones et al., 2016). Our project assesses the attitudes of Texans to funding options for conservation, which will facilitate public decisions about expanding revenues for conservation.

With more Texans residing in urban areas, the value placed on state parks has also increased as people seek opportunities to immerse themselves in nature. Park visitations in Texas—along with those who say wildlife conservation efforts and state parks are essential to life—have skyrocketed (Anchondo, 2019). In 2017, nearly 10 million people—a 20% increase from 2012—visited 95 state and historical parks operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (Anchondo, 2019). Furthermore, a 2014 poll found more than 80% of Texans deemed state parks and preserving nature as “essential” to a happy, healthy, and active lifestyle (Anchondo, 2019; Conservation Challenges, 2019).

Funding from Recovering America's Wildlife Act could allow Texas and other states to address their needs for conservation and recreation, but each state must find a source of revenue to match those federal funds. Current sources of conservation funding within Texas and most other states are exhausted. Therefore, it is essential that TPWD find alternative mechanisms of funding to support conservation.

2018/2019 CAPSTONE REPORT

The 2018–2019 Capstone prepared a report that described methods for generating revenue for conservation. The 2019 study surveyed

attitudes to fees, taxes and lotteries in two groups: Chambers of Commerce and Members of the Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife. Although 24 Chambers and 140 Alliance members were contacted, only 10 Chambers and 45 Alliance members participated. The survey included seven questions concerning equitability, seven about viability, and seven about practicality of seven revenue methods. When asked about the importance of public funding for other social services (e.g., education, transportation, health, and safety and corrections), wildlife organizations were more likely to respond that public funding for conservation was more important than funding for other services when compared to chambers of commerce. Additionally, 79% of wildlife organizations were in support of RAWA while only 19% of chambers of commerce supported the proposed Bill. It was reported that the possible funding solutions with the most positive responses were stamps, a plastic bag tax, license plate fees, lottery, carbon emissions tax, and outdoor recreation tax. Wildlife organizations were 17% more likely to support any option of conservation funding than were chambers of commerce. The least favorable funding mechanisms were the sugary drink tax, a real estate tax, restaurant tax, and a snack food tax.

The 2019 Capstone experienced issues with their report including a limited number of responses, a relatively small representation of the state's public sector, and response error. The 2020 Capstone team identified a different public sector group—Councils of Government—that represent elected officials and their constituents over wider areas than chambers of commerce. The 2020 Capstone refined and revised the 2019 survey to reduce ambiguities and to explore additional funding avenues.

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with other revenue generating approaches.

Bird Watching Supplies Tax

Bird watchers utilize areas of nature, much like hunters and fishers but do not pay for those uses except for access to private and public property. Currently, there are no taxes imposed on bird watching supplies in Texas, which we have identified as a potential revenue source due to their use of and participation in natural areas.

Transportation Sector

The transportation system impacts conservation directly and indirectly. Vehicles strike wildlife in air, sea and land while spreading noise and chemical pollution as well as invasive species and diseases. Roads, railroads, seaports and airports damage wildlife habitat and act as a source of light, noise and chemical pollutants.

Aircraft Gas Tax

Since an aircraft is a significant source of carbon emissions, an upstream or downstream tax could be placed on the take-off and landing of aircrafts. An upstream tax would place a burden on the airline. However, airlines could still place the burden on consumers by raising ticket prices (Hardisty, et al., 2019). A downstream tax, on the other hand, places the burden on customers buying air tickets. In the research conducted by (Hardisty, et al., 2019), customers were more likely to choose a flight with a carbon tax when the additional price was described as a “carbon offset for aviation fuel production and import” than when it was described using other frames, such as a “carbon tax for aviation travel.”

A per-plane tax is another possible approach that could be used to apply a carbon emissions tax. It encompasses the framework that the more

Councils of Governments were used to measure Texans attitudes to a wide variety of potential funding mechanisms. The 2020 Capstone team expanded upon the previous year's report by identifying nine potential funding mechanisms that could be implemented statewide. Possible funding mechanisms included:

Goods and Services

- Sporting goods tax
- Bird watching supplies tax

Transportation Sector

- Aircraft gas tax
- Carbon emissions tax
- Vehicle title application fees
- Vehicle Registration fees
- Vehicle inspection fees

Commerce and Income

- National income tax
- LLC registration fee
- Conservation/wildlife fund

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO FUND CONSERVATION

Goods and Services

Excise taxes on goods and services for hunting and fishing as well as licenses for the use of wildlife are already accepted methods that could be enhanced.

Sporting Goods Tax

The excise tax levied on sporting goods is collected on hunting and fishing supplies to support state and local parks, and other natural sites. This tax is only imposed on a small population of hunters, fishermen, and other participants in outdoor activities. While this funding mechanism is already in place, it is important to determine the current support for the established method as a comparison



someone pollutes, the more tax they should pay. This tax is payable based upon the certified CO₂ emissions (per g/km) of an aircraft and provides an incentive to reduce fuel usage.

Carbon Emissions

Transportation is the largest producer of greenhouse gas equivalents in the United States. Greenhouse gases and associated atmospheric pollutants have direct effects on wildlife by changing the air temperature as well as both temperature and acidity of water. Despite being the third largest producer of carbon in the world, the U.S. is one of the only large industrialized countries without a policy that puts a price on carbon emissions. Although the federal government has authority through the Clean Air Act to regulate carbon emissions, it has not implemented a federal tax (42 U.S.C. §§7401 et seq.). Since carbon affects the environment and wildlife, this leaves

the opportunity for Texas to implement a carbon emission tax as a means of raising revenue for state environmental conservation. In a national 2013 study, the Congressional Budget Office determined that a carbon tax of \$20 per metric ton on greenhouse gas emissions would raise \$1.2 trillion in revenues over the 2020-2021 period (Congressional Budget Office, 2013). Although more research needs to be done on Texas' carbon emissions, it is clear that taxing it would be a profitable source of conservation revenue. In the U.S, however, taxes on such emissions have not been supported by either voters or legislators.

Vehicle Title Application Fees

Vehicle title application fees in Texas are between \$28 and \$33, with most of the fee being kept by the county in which the title application fee is paid (Texas DMV, 2019). Approximately 6.84 million vehicle titles were issued in Texas in 2017,

generating \$209,608,548 in revenue (Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), 2018). Of that total, an estimated \$34,182,675 from vehicle title application fees and \$2,938,055 of rebuilt vehicle title application fees was allocated to General Revenue Fund – 1 (Texas DMV, 2018). This means that about 18% of all vehicle title fees are dedicated to the General Revenue Fund – 1 (Texas DMV, 2018). Being that this is a substantial sum of money, increasing vehicle title fees would increase the overall allocation to General Revenue Fund – 1 (Texas DMV, 2018).

Vehicle Registration Fees

According to the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (2019), approximately 25 million vehicles are registered annually. Accounting for tax collection charges, a \$1 wildlife conservation fee applied on each vehicle registered has the potential to raise \$25 million annually. Similar policies have been imposed in California and Colorado. In California, Proposition 21 (2000) proposed to amend the state constitution to impose a flat \$18 tax per registered car, which was estimated to raise \$500M/ year for wildlife conservation.

Vehicle Inspection Fees

The vehicle inspection fee funding mechanism would operate exactly like the vehicle registration fee mechanism, as the two are separate fees in Texas. Inspection fees in the State are currently \$7 (if the vehicle is not registered in a county that requires emissions testing, which requires a greater fee). This avenue could be considered appropriate, but vehicle inspections are no longer being conducted in some states and there have been several proposed actions in the Texas Legislature to eliminate vehicle inspections as a legal requirement. This would result in the absence of inspection fees being collected, and therefore is

not seen as the most reliable funding mechanism.

Commerce and Income

Broad based taxes are direct approaches to collecting revenue for a public good such as roads, hospitals and school. In this case, wildlife populations and habitat are a public good that requires broad support from individuals as well as companies.

National Income Tax

This mechanism would operate as an income tax check off just as seen with charitable donations. Currently, federal income taxes paid provide funding to social programs, national defense, and interest on the national debt (Internal Revenue Service (IRS), 2020a). When deductions for income taxes are itemized, it is possible to deduct contributions to qualified organizations of property or money (IRS, 2020b). At this time, it is possible to deduct no more than 50% of adjusted gross income, with the maximum deduction being 20 and 30% in some special circumstances (IRS, 2020b).

Limited Liability Company (LLC)

Registration Fees

In order to register a limited liability company (LLC) in Texas, an individual is required to pay a \$300 fee and files a Form 205 with the Secretary of State. The rationale behind imposing an additional fee that can be assessed for conservation to an LLC registration is that any new company will contribute to the carbon footprint on the environment that the State will have to face.

Conservation/Wildlife Fund

Conservation finance as a mechanism through which an indirect or a direct financial investment is made to conserve the values of an ecosystem for the long term (Credit Suisse

DATA COLLECTION

et al., 2014). For the purpose of this study, we did not research investment mechanisms nor investors but rather we sought to measure the risk appetite of COGs and Alliance members. We classified the risk appetite in three groups namely low-risk, medium-risk, and high-risk. Examples of medium-risk investments include equities and fixed income securities. Low-risk funds comprise investment vehicles such as government treasury bills, municipal bonds,

and utility companies. High-risk investments include alternative investments (such as Antique collectables), hedge funds, derivative trading, and real estate investments. Measuring the risk appetite of COGs will allow us to determine the type of funds they will support, and therefore will help develop possible funding options where the private sector can also take an active role in conservation.

Data Collection

RECRUITING RESPONDENTS

After consulting with the 2018-19 capstone project and interviewing Texas Park and Wildlife personnel, we identified two groups for the survey: The Texas Alliance for America's Fish (Alliance) and Wildlife and the 24 Texas Councils of Government (COG). Alliance member organizations will serve as the control group because these organizations have publicly endorsed HR 3742 and will be generally more accepting of funding conservation.

COGs will serve as the experimental group that would represent the general public. "The 24 regional councils, also known as councils of governments, are comprised of city, county and special district members working together to implement cost-effective, results-oriented strategies that address statewide and local needs on a regional scale" (Texas Association of Regional Councils, 2020).

The desired response rates for the two groups

were 20% for the Alliance and 50% for the Councils of Government. With the given sample sizes, the team felt that these response rates would provide an ample amount of data to justify findings. Surveys were sent out via mail followed by emails after two weeks, another email after one week, and a phone call after another week until we reached our desired response rates.

GOALS AND HYPOTHESIS

Our goal was to find funding methods for conservation that are acceptable to Texans based on consensus in responses of both the councils of government and the wildlife organizations. We hypothesized that Alliance organizations will rank all funding methods more highly than the COG because wildlife organizations have a vested interest in conservation. Our study design, therefore, uses the wildlife organizations as a positive control for comparison with the broader attitudes of COG to funding conservation.

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other popular programs to gain a sense of value towards conservation.

COMPOSITING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

We used a survey of twelve questions. We asked each respondent what organization they were representing, the classification of their organization, and their title within the organization to ensure we were receiving responses from people qualified to speak on behalf of the organization. We then asked if the organization was involved in strategic planning. If so, they were asked how much they considered conservation when developing strategic plans. They were also asked to rank conservation's importance in relation to

The next section of the survey uses a Likert scale to gather opinions on what sector should pay for conservation, and the equitability, practicality, and long-term viability of seven proposed funding mechanisms. We then asked if the organizations support creating a separate reserve fund for conservation, if that fund should be managed publicly or privately, and at what risk/return level they would like to see that fund invested. The last question on the survey asks if their organization is in support of "Recovering America's Wildlife Act" HR 3742.



Data Analysis

The survey was sent to all 24 Councils of Governments (COGs) in Texas. We received 10 responses for a response rate of 42%. The survey was also sent to 140 organizations in the Alliance out of which 45 responded (32% response rate). The Alliance organizations served as the control group for comparison with the COGs. The majority of the surveys for both groups were submitted by an executive director. From the Alliance group, the most (26.7%) responses were state and national entities, whereas 20% were nature centers/preserves. Other major organizations included local (city) groups at 17.8% and regional (county) organizations at 15.6%. In the Alliance group, almost 90% of members considered conservation “all of the time” when developing strategic plans, which makes sense because the Alliance is the control group for our survey and is supportive of the environment and conservation. However, only 40% of the COG considered conservation “most of the time” and “some of the time” when developing strategic plans, and 10% “rarely or did not consider” conservation when developing strategic plans. This section will explore the comparisons between both groups in respect to the questions asked in the survey.

DATA METHODOLOGY

We used two sets of questionnaires, one for each of our two categories (i.e., COGs and the Alliance organizations). The data we received

was mainly qualitative in nature, so we used the Likert scale from zero to five to quantify survey responses. For most of the questions, there were five options ranging from “Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree” and “Very Unlikely to Very Likely.” The values for such questions were scaled from one to five, with one being “Strongly Disagree” and “Very Unlikely” and five being “Strongly Agree” and “Very Likely” We normalized the scale on the value of three as the neutral response. This changed our scale to values ranging between negative two and two, where values less than zero i.e. (between negative two and zero) were considered as “No Support” whereas the values greater than zero i.e. (between zero and two) were considered to be in “Support”. This helped us in determining and comparing the support for different funding alternatives as well as the perception as to who should pay for conservation across the two distinct groups. This helped us in determining and comparing the support for different funding alternatives as well as the perception as to who should pay for conservation across the two distinct groups.

For the COGs their unweighted responses were weighted by the population of the counties they encompassed. In this way, the COGs with higher populations were given more weight than those with smaller populations. When it comes to passing legislation the responses of the Alliance could be compared to Senate votes,

Table 1. COMPARISON OF CONSERVATION FUNDING MECHANISMS BETWEEN COGS AND ALLIANCE

	Individual		
	Alliance (n = 45)	COGs Unweighted (n = 10)	COGs Weighted (n = 10)
<i>State/Fed Tax Revenue</i>	1.40*** (0.12)	0.63 (0.42)	0.03 (0.41)
<i>National Income tax</i>	0.61*** (0.18)	0.00 (0.33)	-0.38 (0.22)
<i>Bird Feeding/Watching Tax</i>	0.59*** (0.22)	0.25 (0.41)	-0.19 (0.54)
<i>Sporting Goods Tax</i>	0.68*** (0.20)	-0.63 (0.53)	-0.34 (0.32)
<i>Private Partnership</i>	0.82*** (0.16)	1.25*** (0.31)	1.06*** (0.35)
<i>Hunting and Fishing Fee</i>	1.75*** (0.09)	1.38*** (0.26)	0.71*** (0.23)
<i>Charge Oil and Gas</i>	1.57*** (0.12)	0.63 (0.46)	-0.34 (0.31)
<i>Fee on Int. Travel</i>	-0.32 (0.20)	-0.63 (0.38)	-0.94 (0.36)
<i>Environmental Pollution Fine</i>	1.62*** (0.12)	1.38*** (0.38)	0.36 (0.41)

Standard Errors in parenthesis. Significance of t-test: *** P<0.001; ** P<0.05; * P<0.1.
NOTE: For mean calculations, we have only included observations that provided a response.

which are not proportional; while the weighted responses of the COGs could be compared to votes of the House of Representatives, which are proportional.

RESULTS

Due to a limited data and small number of responses from the Councils of Government, we initially used the data as it is. Then to take into account any bias, we also used the populations for the respective COGs to get the weighted averages. Unweighted data in this case is analogous to senate votes, whereas weighted data are analogous to the popular vote or house of representatives. This minimized the bias that could have existed in responses due to high population variations across the COGs.

Alliance Perception

Amongst the responses received from Alliance members, state/federal tax revenue, environmental pollution fine, charge on oil and gas, and hunting and fishing fees were the highest rated funding mechanisms with an average score of 1.40, 1.62, 1.57, and 1.75, respectively. Given the wildlife conservation funding programs already in existence, like the hunting and fishing license, it was no surprise that programs already in effect received the highest support. While no environmental pollution fee exists for the purpose of conservation, support for this approach can be best explained by the direct effect pollution has on the environment and, by extension, wildlife.

National income tax, bird feeding/watching tax, sporting goods tax, and private partnership had low support (scores below one but higher than zero) while fees on international travel had

no support at -0.32. Lack of support for these programs can be attributed to the novelty of the funding mechanism. The international travel fees option was the least favored option but was also the most ambitious of the funding mechanisms. Alliance members may not support increasing taxes for airplane travel given that their private and work travel is already considered too expensive.

COGs' Perception

Weighted and unweighted responses showed differences in how COGs support the different funding methods. Unweighted perceptions for hunting and fishing fees, environmental pollution fee, and private partnership were the highest rated with scores of 1.38, 1.38, and 1.25. In contrast, weighted results showed less support for the different funding options. The only funding option to score higher than a one was private partnerships. Similar to the Alliance's opinion, COGs were more supportive of programs that are either already established or where a direct link between the impact and the fee exists, which is consistent with the principle of "user pays". Support for private partnerships can be explained by the COGs' preference for reducing the financial burden on the public sector.

Weighted COG results also varied when identifying which funding approaches had no support. Looking at unweighted responses, COGs did not support the national income tax, sporting goods tax, and fee on international travel. As for our weighted results, national income tax, bird feeding/watching tax, sporting goods tax, charge on oil and gas, and fee on international travel had no support from the most populous COGs. The number of programs not supported by COGs in this observation

Table 2. ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES

	Equity			Practicality			Long-term Viability		
	Alliance (n = 45)	COGs Unweighted (n = 10)	COGs Weighted (n = 10)	Alliance (n = 45)	COGs Unweighted (n = 10)	COGs Weighted (n = 10)	Alliance (n = 45)	COGs Unweighted (n = 10)	COGs Weighted (n = 10)
Air Fee	-0.09 (0.18)	-0.25 (0.53)	-1.03*** (0.41)	-0.16 (0.21)	-0.25 (0.59)	-1.03*** (0.42)	0.64*** (0.20)	-0.25 (0.49)	-0.66 (0.44)
Air Tax	0.32* (0.19)	0.25 (0.53)	-0.93*** (0.43)	-0.07 (0.21)	-0.13 (0.64)	-1.24*** (0.34)	0.66*** (0.21)	-0.13 (0.52)	-0.64 (0.45)
Vehicle Title Fee	0.39* (0.20)	-0.38 (0.50)	-1.24*** (0.31)	0.21 (0.19)	0.25 (0.59)	-0.94*** (0.44)	0.75*** (0.19)	-0.25 (0.53)	-0.67 (0.45)
Vehicle Inspection Fee	0.30 (0.21)	-0.75* (0.45)	-1.05*** (0.39)	0.21 (0.20)	-0.13 (0.55)	-1.00*** (0.42)	0.77*** (0.18)	-0.50 (0.50)	-0.70 (0.44)
Vehicle Registration Fee	0.41*** (0.20)	-0.50 (0.57)	-1.02*** (0.42)	0.19 (0.18)	0.25 (0.59)	-0.94*** (0.44)	0.77*** (0.18)	-0.25 (0.53)	-0.67 (0.45)
Sporting Good Tax	0.48*** (0.18)	-0.13 (0.58)	-0.26 (0.34)	0.47*** (0.17)	0.00 (0.54)	-0.22 (0.32)	0.77*** (0.17)	-0.25 (0.49)	0.20 (0.40)
LLC Fee	-0.52*** (0.18)	-0.50 (0.54)	-1.40*** (0.31)	-0.70*** (0.20)	-1.00*** (0.50)	-1.48*** (0.28)	-0.23 (0.20)	-0.50 (0.60)	-1.41*** (0.31)

Standard Errors in parenthesis. Significance of t-test: *** P<0.001; ** P<0.05; * P<0.1.

NOTE: For mean calculations, we have only included observations that provided a response.

increases by two, which suggest larger cities are opposed to funding mechanisms that directly target their constituents. Overall, since they are not politically viable options, the two tax approaches had no support. The constituents COGs represent may not be in favor of raising their taxes to conserve wildlife. Furthermore, a lack of support on international travel can be attributed to the inevitable financial burden placed on the public or airlines.

Alliance and COGs

The results showed that although there are differences in support between the Alliance and COGs' preference of funding mechanisms, they still express support for the implementation of conservation funding. Both are supportive of hunting and fishing fees and an environmental pollution fine, however, they did not support fees on international travel. The Alliance and

DATA ANALYSIS

COGs strongly support implementing a penalty for pollution--with an average score of 1.62 and 1.34 (unweighted), respectively-- while they both express low support for implementing a tax or fee to collect revenue for conservation. It is also important to note how weighted (i.e., the popular or House of Representatives vote) changes the average support for these funding methods.

Support for various fees and/or taxes by the Alliance and COGs is shown in Table 2 above. For the following analysis, the weighted numbers of the COGs were used. Comparing the various support of fees and/or taxes by the Alliance and the COGs, the fees with the most support were the sporting goods tax and the vehicle registration fee. Overall the sporting goods tax had the most support from the Alliance group and the least opposition from the COGs. Based on the analysis, 0 is neutral and any positive number shows support for the tax/fee, while any negative number is opposition. Looking at the sporting goods tax, for equity, the Alliance scored at 0.48 and the COGs scored at -0.26. On practicality, the Alliance scored at 0.465 and the COGs scored at -0.22. For long-term viability, the Alliance scored at 0.77 and the COGs scored at 0.10. The sporting goods tax, however, is an existing tax and would not be increased.

A vehicle registration fee had the highest support from the Alliance and COGs. For equity, the Alliance scored it at 0.50 and the COGs scored at -1.02. For practicality, the Alliance scored it 0.33 and COGS at -0.94. For long-term viability, the Alliance scored at 0.83 and COGS at -0.67. COGs disapproved of the vehicle registration fee the least. The funding mechanism with

the most support was the sporting goods tax because, of all the funding mechanisms, it is the most connected to conservation. The funding mechanism with the second-most support/least opposition was a vehicle registration fee.

Creation of a Wildlife Fund

The wildlife conservation fund survey section had three questions, shown in Tables 3 and 4 below, ranging from general to more specific funding options. Three of the ten COGs were in favor of and agreed to a fund dedicated to wildlife. This included the North Central Texas COG. Since this is representative of Dallas—a city with a high population density—it was given more weight in our analysis. Two councils of government strongly agreed with a wildlife fund, whereas four were neutral, including densely-populated Houston. One COG strongly disagreed with the fund. Based on this data, we can infer there is potential for COGs to support a wildlife fund. Furthermore, if we adjust the results based on populations by assigning weights to densely-populated areas, we get a mean of 0.67, which inclines favoring a wildlife fund. Of the Alliance groups, eight organizations voted neutral, 17 were in favor, 13 were strongly in favor, two disagreed, and five strongly disagreed with the fund. The average of 0.69 shows Alliance members are in favor of a wildlife fund.

Next, we examined perceptions of a private or public fund. All the responses that answered this question had supported a fund in the previous question as well. Overall, respondents were in favor of a public fund dedicated to conversation rather than a private fund. Five COGs were neutral, one was in favor, one disagreed, and

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION IN TEXAS

three strongly disagreed with a private fund. The weighted average of -0.34 indicates that a private fund is not supported. With respect to the Alliance groups' perception of a private fund, 15 organizations voted neutral, 19 favored, seven strongly favored, three disagreed, and one strongly disagreed with it. The average came out to be 0.62. Unlike the COGs, Alliance organizations were slightly inclined towards a private fund supporting wildlife or conservation. In terms of a public fund, four COGs responded neutrally, three were in favor, one was strongly in favor, and two strongly disagreed. The COGs'

Table 3. COG SUPPORT FOR FUND

COG	Support for a fund	Support for a Private Green Fund	Support for a Public Green Fund
<i>Brazos Valley</i>	1		1
<i>Coastal Bend</i>		1	1
<i>Heart of Texas</i>	1		
<i>Houston-Galveston area</i>			
<i>Nortex Regional Planning Commission</i>			
<i>Panhandle Regional Planning Commission</i>	1		1
<i>South Plains Association of Governments</i>			
<i>West Central Texas</i>			
<i>North Central Texas</i>	1		1
<i>Alamo Area</i>	1		
Total	5	1	4

Table 4. ALLIANCE SUPPORT FOR FUND

Organization Class	Total	Support for a fund	Support for a <i>Private Green Fund</i>	Support for a <i>Public Green Fund</i>
<i>Land Trust</i>	3	0	1	1
<i>Local/Special Focused Organizations</i>	6	4	3	4
<i>Nature Centre/Preserve</i>	7	3	6	4
<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	3	2	1	1
<i>Professional Services</i>	2	2	1	1
<i>Regional Organizations</i>	7	6	4	5
<i>State and National Entity</i>	12	8	6	7
Total	40	25	22	23

weighted average of 0.17 is not significantly different from zero, showing that they are neither supportive nor against a public fund. With respect to the Alliance groups, 14 organizations responded neutral to a public fund, 20 were in favor, seven were strongly in favor, while only three disagreed and one strongly disagreed. Alliance’s average was 0.64, which also shows a favorable inclination towards a public fund.

Risk Appetite of the Fund

For the risk investment question, five COGs were unsure or preferred not to answer. Five were interested in investing in some kind of low- or medium-risk fund. None opted to invest in a

high-risk fund while three opted for a medium-risk fund. Examples of medium-risk funds include equities and stock markets. Two COGs indicated they would consider investing in low-risk funds, such as government treasury bills, while five preferred not to answer. The weighted average for this question was 2.09, which shows preference for low- and medium-risk funds. When it came to the Alliance perception, 17 either preferred not to answer or were unsure; nine selected low-risk, 18 chose medium-risk, and one chose a high-risk fund. The average came out to be 2.14, which is similar to the COGs’ perception.

The Texas Treasury Safekeeping Trust Company (2020) makes 17.4% of their total investments in real estate, which are considered to be high-risk. Of these real estate investments, 90% are made in North American and European markets, which are less risky than Asian and emerging markets. Therefore, the overall risk becomes medium. Global fixed income and public equities, which are a range of medium- to high-risk, comprise 17.6% of investments. Similar patterns as the real estate assets were shown in terms of investing in developed areas. However, on the contrary only 21.3% invested in medium-risk hedge equities. Such investment behavior supports the potential for individuals to invest in a high- to medium-risk wildlife fund.

LIMITATIONS

Data Limitations

There are a few limitations to our study worth mentioning. Foremost is the small sample size of the Councils of Government. While the actual response rate (42%, or 10 out of 24) was sufficient, only having 10 responses could be seen as a limited representation of the Texas population. The Alliance group yielded a 32% response rate on 45 out of 140 surveys. The response rates for both groups are considerably higher than last year’s survey (5.53% Chambers of Commerce; 12% Alliance groups). Another major limitation are incomplete survey responses assumed to be due to a lack of user-friendliness. Question 5 of the survey, where the respondent had to rank programs from one to seven, was time consuming. It was observed in most of the responses that the respondent who answered this question skipped most of the later questions and vice-versa.

Key Assumptions

We have made a few assumptions we believe were necessary for our analysis and recommendations. First, we have assumed that COGs truly represent their population’s values, attitudes, and beliefs. Population size plays a major role here. We used weighted averages to illustrate representation, using populations as weights. This is to say COGs that encompass cities with large populations, such as Houston or Dallas, are assigned a higher weight than COGs that cover areas of smaller populations. Urban areas are highly populated, but wildlife conservation issues mostly exist in rural areas, and rural areas have a lower weight. This assumption makes sense because the highest share of money would be raised from largely urban areas; therefore, highly populated COGs are given higher weights. Population weights made the data more justifiable and all opinions fairly represented.

Our last assumption pertains to questions about the creation and management of a conservation/ wildlife fund. We have assumed that all the COGs and Alliance members are aware of the risk appetite of publicly and privately managed funds. We also assumed that on average all the COGs will base their understanding of appetite consistent with the Texas Water Development Authority. Government managed funds are less risky, hence preferred.

Recommendation

Based on the information from the 2018/2019 Capstone report and our findings through our own survey, we recommend a vehicle registration fee to fund conservation. In terms of practicality, long-term viability, and equitability, Alliance members and Councils of Governments ranked vehicle registration second highest. An additional \$1 fee on all vehicle registrations in Texas would yield the desired \$20 million annually. Furthermore, the framework for adding an additional fee to vehicle registration will encounter the fewest obstacles because the Texas legislature already has a system in place to impose fees on registrations. Using vehicle registration fees as the funding mechanism to raise the \$20 million needed is also supported by the 2018/2019 Capstone findings. When considering the short turnaround that the Texas legislature needs the funding to get the match for RAWA, vehicle registration is the best avenue to raise \$20 million annually to support conservation. This method is also believed to be the most sustainable for the future.

While vehicle title and inspection fees scored similarly on the survey, title fees are not preferred because these fees are not annually recurring, and therefore do not produce a consistent yield as vehicle registration fees. Additionally, the future of required vehicle inspection in Texas is uncertain because other states have already abolished mandatory vehicle testing.

Although the sporting goods tax scored the highest on the survey, the group does not recommend advocating for an increase in the tax. The 2019 passage of Proposition 5 in the Texas legislature dedicated revenue from the sales tax on sporting goods to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission. This is a funding avenue that is not likely to be expanded, so it is not recommended the sales tax on sporting goods be altered further. While it could be expanded by increasing the allocation from the comptroller, an increase in the price of goods could result. Ultimately, this would reduce sales and thus, revenues in Texas.

A more long-term solution could lie in the development of a wildlife fund. COGs and Alliance groups both scored this as a favorable potential funding mechanism. However, the time it would take to establish such a fund, combined with determining the logistics of it, makes this an option better suited for the future by following established funding mechanisms for water development and transportation in Texas. Therefore, it is recommended Texas proceed with implementing a \$1 fee on vehicle registrations and consider the future establishment of a wildlife fund.



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APPENDICES

A Letter for COGS

This letter was sent to all 24 Councils of Government, along with a paper copy of the survey, and provides an overview of the capstone project. The letter then requests the receiving COG to fill out our survey via the link we provided in the letter, or by returning the paper copy included in the mailed packet.

B E-mail Sent to COGS

This e-mail was used as a template to send to COGs that had not responded to the survey by the indicated deadline. It included an overview of the project, and once again asked them to please complete the survey.

C Letter for Alliance Members

This letter was sent to all Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife members, along with a paper copy of the survey, and provides an overview of the capstone project. The letter then requests the receiving COG to fill out our survey via the link we provided in the letter, or by returning the paper copy included in the mailed packet.

D E-mail Sent to Alliance Members

This e-mail was used as a template to send to Alliance members that had not responded to the survey by the indicated deadline. It included an overview of the project, and once again asked them to please complete the survey.

E Survey for COGS

This was the survey that was sent to all COGS via a Google Surveys link in the initial e-mail, as well as a paper copy mailed with the cover letter mentioned above.

F Survey for Alliance Members

This was the survey that was sent to all Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife members via a Google Surveys link in the initial e-mail, as well as a paper copy mailed with the cover letter mentioned above.

APPENDIX A

LETTER FOR COGS



Dear Texas Council of Government:

The capstone group at The Bush School of Public Service and Administration at Texas A&M University are developing an understanding of how conservation could be financed in Texas. Based on your position, we are asking you to help us with this research study. We have enclosed a questionnaire that will give us some basic information about your organization's perspective on various conservation funding options. If you would prefer to answer the questions online using a computer or your cell phone, please go to bit.ly/txcogs. Your response to this questionnaire, or any question on it, is voluntary and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. There are no foreseeable risks to you from responding.

Please complete this questionnaire to the best of your abilities from the perspective of your organization. Your input is extremely important to this project. It should only take about 5-10 minutes to complete. We have asked every Council of Government in Texas to complete the questionnaire. Some questions may not readily pertain to your organization. Please answer only those questions that apply.

Our primary purpose in conducting this survey is to determine the most feasible funding sources for conservation in Texas. We hope that the results of this survey will be useful to all interested parties by providing a comprehensive picture of the perception of various funding mechanisms. Under no circumstances will your individual responses be shared. Your name or contact information will not be connected with the questionnaire you return to us.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tam.u.edu. If you have any questions, concerns, or would like us to share the survey results with you, please do not hesitate to contact me at capstone2020@tam.u.edu. Please understand that by completing the questionnaire, you are giving permission for us to use your responses for research purposes.

On behalf of our research team, we thank you for considering contributing to our project.

Sincerely,
Colton Haffey
Bush School Capstone Group - Project Manager

Bush School Capstone Group
Texas A&M University
4220 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-4220

IRB NUMBER: IRB2019-1478
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 11/22/2019

APPENDIX B

E-MAIL FOR COGS

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On behalf of our research team, we thank you for considering contributing to our project.

APPENDIX C

LETTER FOR ALLIANCE MEMBERS



Dear Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife Member:

The capstone group at The Bush School of Public Service and Administration at Texas A&M University are developing an understanding of how conservation could be financed in Texas. Based on your position, we are asking you to help us with this research study. We have enclosed a questionnaire that will give us some basic information about your organization's perspective on various conservation funding options. If you would prefer to answer the questions online using a computer or your cell phone, please go to bit.ly/txalliance. Your response to this questionnaire, or any question on it, is voluntary and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. There are no foreseeable risks to you from responding.

Please complete this questionnaire to the best of your abilities from the perspective of your organization. Your input is extremely important to this project. It should only take about 5-10 minutes to complete. We have asked every member of the Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife to complete the questionnaire. Some questions may not pertain to your organization. Please answer only those questions that apply.

Our primary purpose in conducting this survey is to determine the most feasible funding sources for conservation in Texas. We hope that the results of this survey will be useful to all interested parties by providing a comprehensive picture on the perception of various funding mechanisms. Under no circumstances will your individual responses be shared. Your name or contact information will not be connected with the questionnaire you return to us.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tam.u.edu. If you have any questions, concerns, or would like us to share the survey results with you, please do not hesitate to contact me at capstone2020@tam.u.edu. Please understand that by completing the questionnaire, you are giving permission for us to use your responses for research purposes.

On behalf of our research team, we thank you for considering contributing to our project.

Sincerely,
Colton Haffey
Bush School Capstone Group - Project Manager

Bush School Capstone Group
Texas A&M University
4220 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-4220

IRB NUMBER: IRB2019-1478
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 11/22/2019

APPENDIX D

E-MAIL FOR ALLIANCE MEMBERS

Dear Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife Member:

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On behalf of our research team, we thank you for considering contributing to our project.

APPENDIX E

SURVEY FOR COGS

Survey of Methods to Fund Texas Conservation

Thank you for taking a few minutes to answer questions about your organization. As noted in our cover letter, the purpose of this project is to provide useful information for our capstone research project on conservation funding in Texas.

If any question is not applicable to your organization, or if you prefer not to answer, you may choose not to respond. Your answers will be held in the strictest confidence.

For the purpose of this survey Conservation is a management practice designed to conserve, restore and steward habitat areas for native plants and animals.

1. What is the name of your organization?

2. What is your title in your organization?

3. Does your organization have a program dedicated to conservation or environmental planning?

- A. Yes
- B. No

4. How frequently do you consider conservation when developing strategic plans?

- A. All of the time
- B. Most of the time
- C. Some of the time
- D. Rarely
- E. Not at all

5. The following are programs commonly seen across COGs in Texas. Please rank each program from 1 (highest-valued) to 7 (lowest-valued).

- A. Economic Development _____
- B. Environment/Conservation _____
- C. Law Enforcement _____
- D. Area Agency on Aging _____
- E. 9-1-1 Emergency Services _____
- F. Housing _____
- G. Transportation _____

6. Currently, conservation is largely funded through the sales of hunting licenses and fishing permits. This funding model is steadily declining and no longer able to meet the growing need for fish and wildlife habitat, public outreach, and education funding. Please rank the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

A. Fines for environmental polluting should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

B. Hunting and Fishing licensing/permit fees should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

C. Partnerships with private sector organizations should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

D. General portion of state/federal tax revenues should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

E. Charge on oil and gas development should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

F. National income tax check off should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

G. A tax on supplies for bird feeding/watching should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

H. Fees on international travel to and from the US should pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

I. The existing allocation of state sales tax on sporting goods should be increased to pay for conservation.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

7. Our research team has identified the following possible routes for state conservation funding. Please evaluate each method for collection of public revenue for conservation on the basis of three criteria: equitable, practicality, and long-term viability. Please rank each method for each criterion.

Equitable- This tax/fee imposes an equal burden on public benefit users

1. Aircraft: Take-off and landing fee
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

2. Aircraft: Gas Tax
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

3. Vehicle title: Individuals pay an added fee of \$1 to the regular title fee
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

4. Vehicle inspection: Individuals pay an added fee of \$1 to the regular inspection fee
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

5. Vehicle registration: Individuals pay an added fee of \$1 to the regular registration fee
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

6. Sporting Goods Tax: An increase on the state sales tax on sporting goods.
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

7. LLC: An added fee for individuals registering their Limited Liability Company
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

Practicality- This tax/fee would encounter few barriers in its implementation

1. Aircraft: Take-off and landing fee
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

2. Aircraft: Gas Tax
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

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Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

7. LLC: An added fee for individuals registering their Limited Liability Company
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

Long-Term Viability- This tax/fee will likely be a sustainable funding source for the next 20 years.

1. Aircraft: Take-off and landing fee
Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

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Strongly disagree - Somewhat disagree - Neutral - Somewhat agree - Strongly agree

8. Will you be willing to support a separate reserve fund to manage wildlife conservation revenues to accrue returns and be held incase of a budget shortfall in the future?

- A. Strongly disagree
- B. Somewhat disagree
- C. Neutral
- D. Somewhat agree
- E. Strongly agree

A **green fund** is an investment fund that will only invest in companies that are deemed socially conscious in their business dealings or directly promote environmental responsibility.

9. How likely is it that your organization would support a green fund that is privately managed, such a mutual fund?

- A. Very Unlikely
- B. Unlikely
- C. Neutral
- D. Likely
- E. Very Likely

10. How likely is it that your organization would support a green fund that is publicly managed, like a state trust fund?

- A. Very Unlikely
- B. Unlikely
- C. Neutral
- D. Likely
- E. Very Likely

11. Would you support investing the money in a:

- A. High risk, high return fund
- B. Medium risk fund
- C. Low risk, low return fund
- D. Unsure/Prefer not to answer

12. Does your organization support “Recovering America’s Wildlife Act 2019” (HR 3742 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3742/text>)?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Unsure/Prefer not to answer

APPENDIX F

SURVEY FOR ALLIANCE MEMBERS

Survey of Methods to Fund Texas Conservation

Thank you for taking a few minutes to answer questions about your organization. As noted in our cover letter, the purpose of this project is to provide useful information for our capstone research project on conservation funding in Texas.

If any question is not applicable to your organization, or if you prefer not to answer, you may choose not to respond. Your answers will be held in the strictest confidence.

For the purpose of this survey Conservation is a management practice designed to conserve, restore and steward habitat areas for native plants and animals.

1. What is the name of your organization?

2. What is your title in your organization?

3. What classification is your organization?

- A. State and national entity
- B. Regional organization
- C. Land trust
- D. Nature center/preserve
- E. Local/special-focused organization
- F. Outdoor recreation
- G. Professional services
- H. Farm and ranch
- I. Industrial
- J. Retail

4. How frequently do you consider conservation when developing strategic plans?

- A. All of the time
- B. Most of the time
- C. Some of the time
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5. The following are programs commonly seen across COGs in Texas. Please rank each program from 1 (highest-valued) to 7 (lowest-valued).

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APPENDIX

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SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION IN TEXAS



