BioPioneering: New Frontiers for Implementing the Texas Wildlife Action Plan on Private Lands

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Abstract: With 10 distinct ecological areas and more than 60 million ha of rural lands, Texas is second only to California in total biodiversity. Since about 95 percent of the state is privately owned, public/private partnerships and economic incentives are essential in managing wildlife, including a status assessment of nongame species and habitats in the state. Completed in 2005, the State Wildlife Action Plan identifies priority species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and plants and their habitats that warrant conservation attention. Although many of these resources are known or thought to be in decline, the true status is unknown because of restricted access to private lands to conduct surveys. The last statewide assessment was conducted by Vernon Bailey in 1905. New tools and approaches are needed today. The use of confidentiality policy, technological advances, and market-based approaches to inventory private lands are being explored in Texas. For example, prospecting for biological diversity is being conducted on private industrial timber lands to determine potential mitigation values. Expansive wetlands are being re-constructed by water supply companies for augmenting existing water supplies with direct benefits to waterfowl and wading birds for nature-based tourism. Conservation credits for endangered species habitat are being pioneered on private lands surrounding Fort Hood. With more than 3.3 million ha already under Wildlife Management Plans in the state, the Texas Park and Wildlife Department is situated to help facilitate these kinds of innovative strategies to landowners and other conservation partners on a voluntary basis. Cooperative conservation already exists in the form of almost 200 wildlife management associations, watershed organizations, and other groups formed to manage common-pool resources on a landscape scale. Assigning economic value to the products and services that functioning ecosystems provide may further stimulate group management of commonly-held natural resources on private lands.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 62:208