TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

A GUIDE FOR

Wildlife Management Associations and Co-ops

Making Tracts for Texas Wildlife

Private Lands and Habitat Program

A GUIDE FOR

Wildlife Management Associations and Co-ops

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Where It All Started 2

Where We Are Now 3

So What Can I Do? 4

Call a Biologist 5

Meet the Neighbors 5

Agree To Work Together 6

Other Benefits 7

Summary 8

- Five Steps to Forming a Wildlife Management Association
- Five Potential Problems of Wildlife Management Associations
- Five Potential Benefits to Landowners in Wildlife Management Associations
- Five Effects of Wildlife Management Associations on Ecosystems

More Useful Information

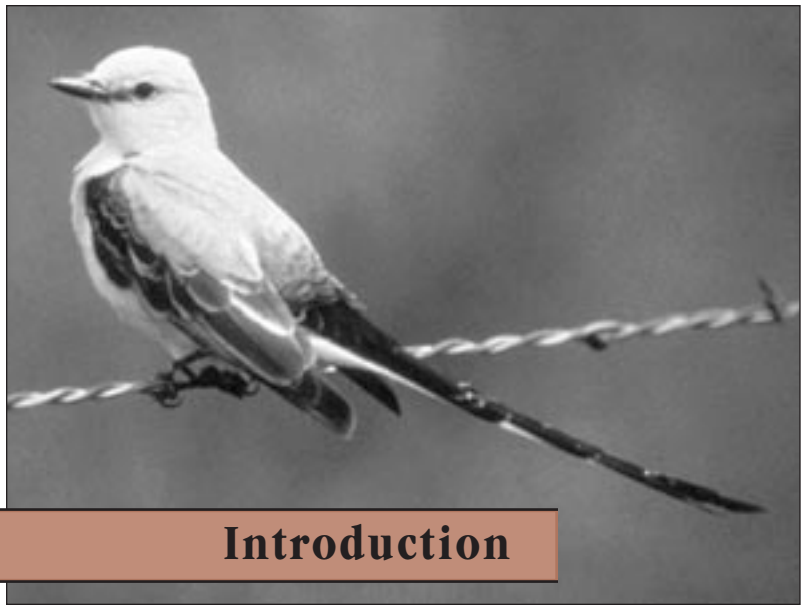
- TPWD Wildlife Regions and Districts 9
- Sample WMA Questions and Answers, Goals, Bylaws, Landowners Cooperative Agreement 10

This booklet is the result of more than 30 years of study, hard work and cooperation among private landowners and wildlife biologists. These "natural partners" have been working together for the benefit of wildlife since 1972, when the Texas Private Lands and Habitat Enhancement Program was conceived. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department provides technical guidance to private landowners with the proven belief that together we can succeed in managing and conserving habitat for the benefit of wildlife. We welcome you to join us in "Making Tracts for Texas Wildlife."

For additional information, please call 1 (800) 792-1112 (menu selection #5) or see our Web site at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us. To request assistance, please contact one of the offices on page 9 of this book.

Written, compiled and edited by:

Mike Berger, Wildlife Division Director
Linda McMurry, Program Administrator
Calvin Richardson, Technical Guidance Biologist – Trans-Pecos
Gene Miller, Technical Guidance Biologist – High Plains–Rolling Plains
Jim Dillard, Technical Guidance Biologist – Cross Timbers & Prairies
Mike Krueger, Technical Guidance Biologist – Cross Timbers & Prairies
Fielding Harwell, Technical Guidance Biologist – Edwards Plateau
Mike Reagan, Technical Guidance Biologist – Edwards Plateau
Matt Wagner, Technical Guidance Biologist – Post Oak Savannah and Blackland Prairie
Micah Poteet, Technical Guidance Biologist – Pineywoods
Gary Homerstad, Technical Guidance Biologist – Gulf Coast Prairies & Marshes
Jimmy Rutledge, Technical Guidance Biologist – South Texas Plains
Dennis Gissell, Program Specialist
Ruben Cantu (former TGB), Regional Director
Bob Carroll, District Leader
Len Polasek, Natural Resources Specialist
Robert Lehmann, Environmental Specialist
Mary Ann Schubert, Administrative Technician
Tommy Hailey (retired)
Ernie Davis (retired)
David Rideout (retired)
Dennis Brown (retired)
Kirby Brown (retired)



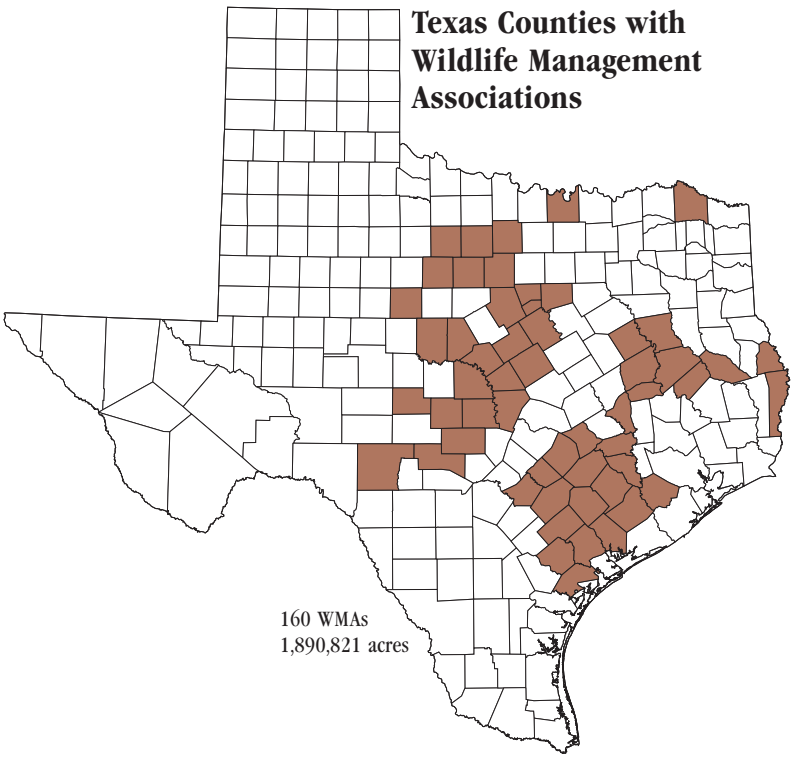
Introduction

Wildlife professionals believe that the greatest threats to wildlife in Texas are habitat loss from land development, conversion of habitats to monocultures, and the fragmentation of land tracts resulting from the breakup of larger ranches and farms. One of the most promising solutions to these problems comes through the efforts of landowners working together to conserve and enhance their land for the benefit of wildlife.

Wildlife Management Associations and Wildlife Co-ops are groups formed by landowners to improve wildlife habitats and associated wildlife populations. The two terms are used interchangeably for these landowner groups and will be referred to as Wildlife Management Associations (WMAs) throughout this booklet. Over 150 WMAs are operating in Texas today and the number grows each year.

Some landowners join WMAs for the benefits of operating under a wildlife management plan. Some join for enhanced recreation such as hunting, birdwatching or fishing, while others simply wish to improve the ecosystem in their local environment. While the specific reasons for creating these landowner groups are many and varied, one clear premise seems to hold true. Texans genuinely love the land and the wildlife, and they are interested in improving habitat for wildlife. As they work to organize WMAs, landowners become involved in effective wildlife management practices and learn to approach wildlife management in a practical way, across a larger landscape, creating numerous benefits for participants.

This publication will address many of the basic considerations associated with the needs of landowners and provide some solid direction for the development of WMAs. These guidelines were developed by the Department for the purpose of fostering development of WMAs.



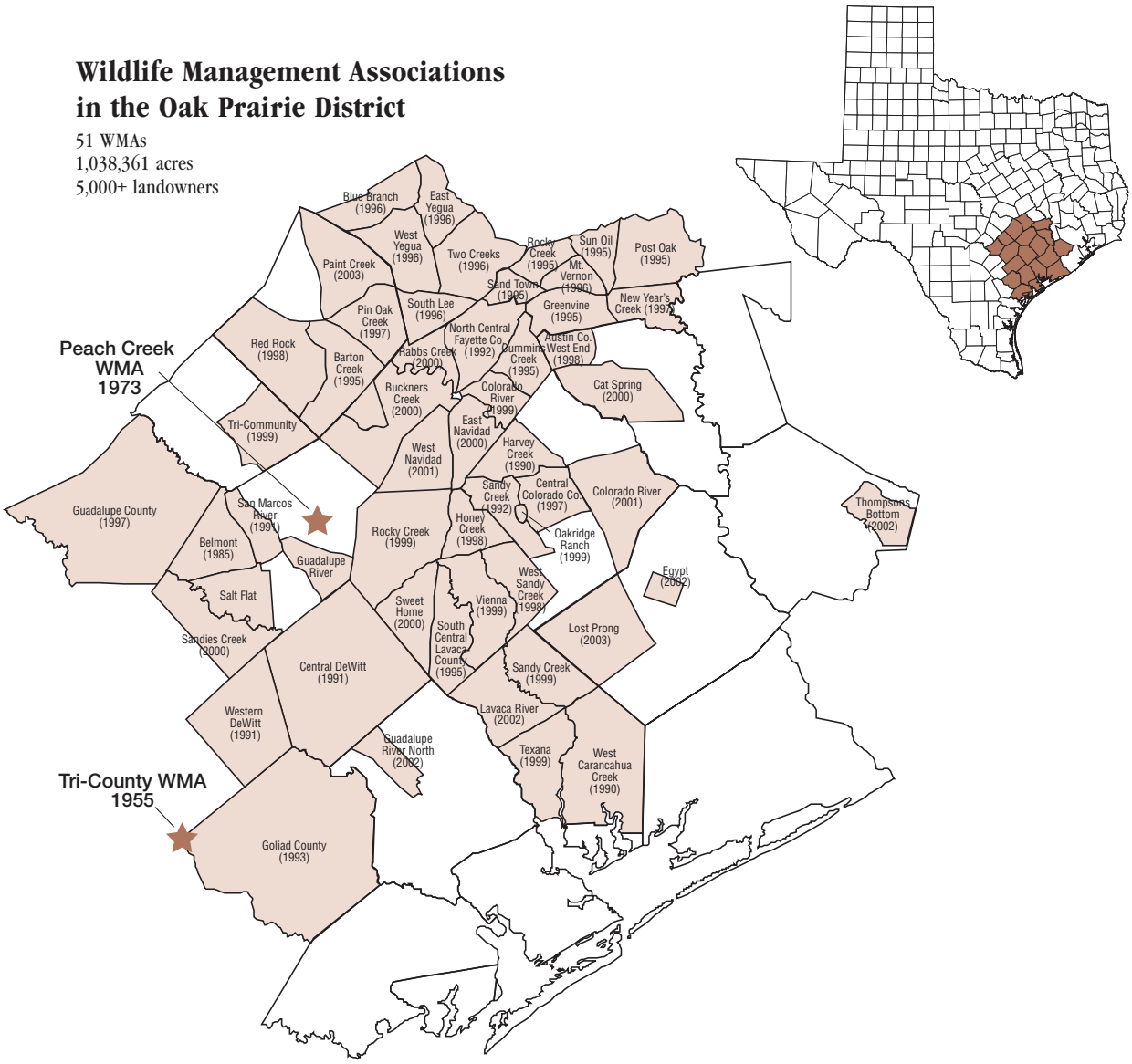
Mr. and Mrs. Heard and grandson display a bois d'arc planted in their shelterbelt.

Where It All Started

The first known WMA in Texas was established in 1955 and operated in the three corners region of Bee, Goliad and Karnes counties. It was called the Tri-County Game Preserve Association. It was not simply a game protection association. The articles of the association included input from a wildlife biologist and addressed many of the same habitat management practices recommended today. One of the stated objectives was to "improve cover and food conditions for wildlife." The articles went on to list eight specific activities to address food and cover including but not limited to deferred grazing programs at proper stocking rates, construction of brush shelters, planting trees and shrubs and increasing weed growth. Association members were expected to "inventory available game on their respective units" for the purpose of a regulated harvest and to also keep harvest records. The association even produced metal boundary/gate signs for its members.

The first modern day WMA in Texas, the Peach Creek Wildlife Management Co-op, was organized in 1973 with the help of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) wildlife biologists Dennis Brown and Donnie Harmel. The Peach Creek Wildlife Management Co-op was developed in response to landowners' desires for improvement in the quality of white-tailed deer. It began with a call from Brian Denman in Gonzales to TPWD biologist Dennis Brown. "He wanted me to help get a group of landowners together to cooperate in a deer management plan," said Brown (now retired). Brown told him, "One of you has to organize it, get it rolling and stay on top of it. Otherwise it just looks like the government is interfering in private business. We'll put on a program and help set up a wildlife management plan, but the establishment of the goals and commitment has to come from the landowners."

That call was the beginning of a new type of cooperation among Texas landowners – an educational process where groups of landowners worked together with wildlife biologists to learn about wildlife and make improvements in the wildlife habitat. Despite the formation of a few WMAs around the state, it would be another 18 years before the WMA revolution would begin in earnest in South Central Texas.



Where We Are Now

Throughout the state, TPWD biologists have helped landowners organize more than 150 WMAs that are working under a TPWD Wildlife Management Plan. This Wildlife Management Plan is a very informative document that gives the past livestock and wildlife history of the area, list habitat improvement techniques for the area, and may require the collection of deer data from the area. A Wildlife Management Plan may also entitle a member of a WMA to special permits granted by TPWD.

The Texas Organization of Wildlife Management Associations (TOWMA), a non-profit umbrella group of WMAs, has found a way to continue and even increase the momentum of member organizations by conducting regular meetings and sharing information about successes in wildlife management and operations. Information about TOWMA and its member WMAs can be accessed on its Web site at www.towma.org or by writing TOWMA at P.O. Box 701, La Grange, Texas 78945.

So What Can I Do?

Managing for wildlife on a small tract of land presents a special challenge. Wild animals are not usually confined by barbed-wire fences and the cost of a high fence is prohibitive and is generally not advisable for most tracts. Success in managing the habitat for healthy wildlife populations depends significantly on the actions and attitudes of neighboring landowners. "Wildlife don't care who owns the land, they are just doing the best they can to make a living," said one association member.

A deer's home range is about one square mile (640 acres), although bucks can range several miles during breeding season. This means that on tracts of land under 1,000 acres, the deer frequently move onto neighboring tracts of land. A neighbor's oat patch can help support them during the lean times.

Other wildlife present similar situations. For instance, a turkey's summer and winter ranges are about one square mile, but the average shift between the two different areas is about four miles. Waterfowl and other migratory birds will travel great distances, but linger only if suitable habitat is available. Some songbirds remain throughout the year, but many are migratory, and a landowner's ability to attract and see these species depends on surrounding habitat. Quail, pheasant, squirrel and other resident wildlife remain close to home, but are typically shared with the neighbors. This sharing is the reason wildlife belongs to the public.

"A WMA consisting of neighbors is a good method to overcome problems of managing for free-ranging wildlife species," says Gary Homerstad, TPWD Technical Guidance Biologist. "WMAs exist all over the state, and in several counties the majority of landowners have banded together to form cooperative landowner groups. It is easy to accomplish, and the benefits can be tremendous. It simply requires an individual landowner to actively promote the concept to his or her neighbors to get the ball rolling," says Homerstad.

"Everywhere WMAs have formed, neighbors have agreed to join in and participate. Most folks believe that wildlife and habitat are important in their lives, for their children and grandchildren, and for future generations," says TPWD Environmental Specialist, Robert Lehmann.

Call a Biologist

Wildlife biologists provide information that is useful for the development of landowner groups, and they give assistance in habitat management. Wildlife biologists at TPWD are ready to help landowners schedule meetings to discuss the possibilities for WMAs. This service is provided free-of-charge through TPWD's Private Lands and Habitat Program. The wildlife biologist's time is in high demand, so call early to schedule meeting dates. To get in touch with a wildlife biologist, contact the nearest TPWD office (see page 8).

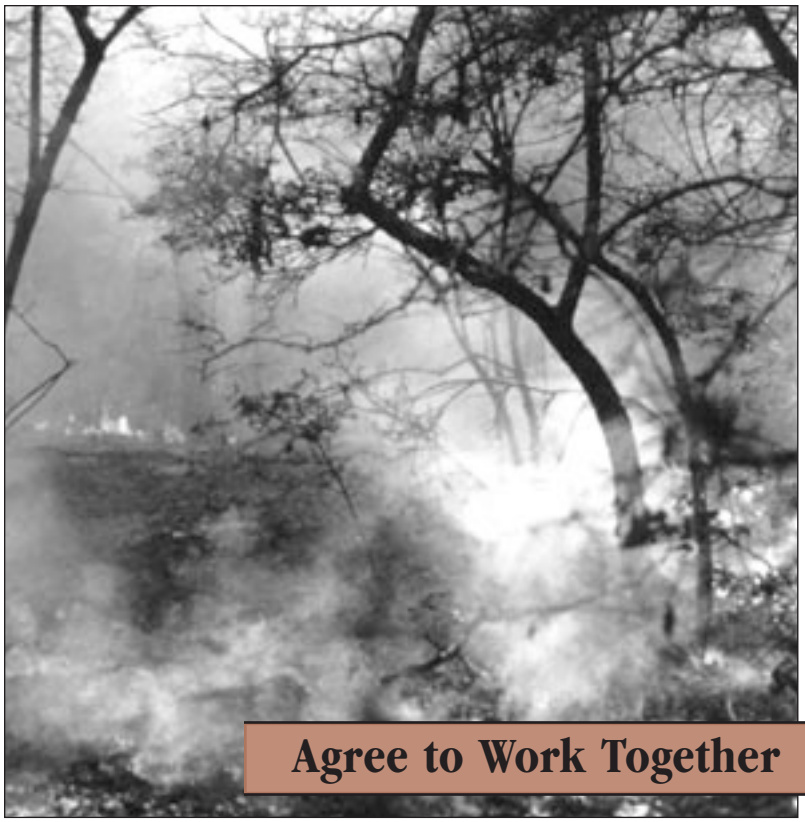
In planning and scheduling meetings to organize WMAs, TPWD biologists have also found that County Tax Appraisal Districts are often very helpful in providing useful information. "A new WMA that I work with recently contacted the County Tax Appraisal District for assistance," said TPWD Technical Guidance Biologist, Mike Krueger. "The tax office very generously provided a map showing land ownership, as well as mailing addresses that were used to send notices inviting folks to attend a meeting to form the new WMA. I would recommend that WMA's should use whatever resources are available in their area to obtain maps and aerial photos as the map also has proven very helpful for coordinating spotlight census routes, necessary for determining wildlife populations," said Krueger.

Meet the Neighbors

Invite the neighbors to a meeting to discuss mutual interests in wildlife. WMAs are good ways to meet new neighbors and re-establish relationships with longtime neighbors and friends.

"It is always gratifying to me to see a group of neighbors (who may have thought that they had nothing in common) realize that they share a common interest in wildlife," says Krueger. "It is amazing how getting together, whether it be for a WMA meeting or riding together in the back of a pickup truck for a deer census, can break down barriers and dispel rumors. I personally feel that the social benefits of a WMA are just as important as the biological benefits," adds Krueger.

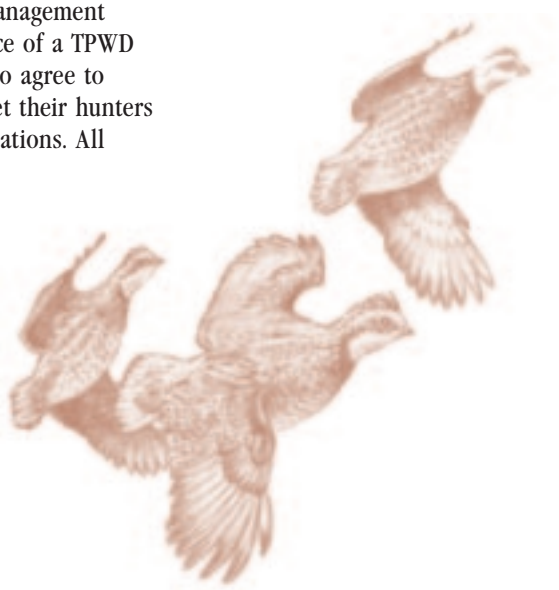
Meetings should be scheduled to maximize attendance and convenience. Residents, as well as absentee landowners and land managers, should be invited and given ample notice to arrange their schedules. Absentee landowners are often very interested in wildlife and many times are key participants in WMAs. Organizational meetings for WMAs often take two hours, allowing for questions, answers and discussion about forming an association. Coffee and cake or barbecues with neighbors are generally very successful at drawing folks together.



Properly planned prescribed burning helps to control the invasion of undesirable vegetation and promote the growth of plants desirable to wildlife.

Agree to Work Together

The formation of a WMA typically entails the development of a landowner agreement that is not legally binding. The biologist can provide examples of agreements (see page 13). Landowners enter into an agreement with the expressed intent to comply in good faith with the program to manage for wildlife. In addition, participating landowners often agree to comply with recommendations from a management plan developed with the assistance of a TPWD wildlife biologist. Landowners also agree to put forth a good-faith effort to get their hunters to comply with these recommendations. All parties should agree to participate in uniform data collections and observations. Every property does not have to be involved to be successful. Many of the good associations have "holes" where some landowners don't participate for one reason or another, but excellent progress is occurring.



Other Benefits

In addition to receiving technical assistance in wildlife management from a wildlife biologist, each WMA member receives a gate sign from TPWD showing that he or she is a member of the landowner group. Signs include a "Posted" notice at the bottom of the sign.

Increased surveillance for law enforcement purposes is an option some organizations choose to incorporate. Like a neighborhood crime watch program, landowners help each other by watching for trespassers or poachers. Association members may post "no trespassing" signs on association lands and may even ask their hunters to produce permission cards. In some areas of the state where trespassing, poaching and night hunting repeatedly occur, landowners have successfully curtailed these outlaw activities and feel that they have regained control over their property.

Hunters are usually very agreeable and often actively assist the WMA in data collection. In areas where wildlife populations are low, some folks by nature are often too kind to say "no" to the over-hunting of their property by friends or relatives. These folks have found that agreements benefit their wildlife populations and take them off the hook by giving them a sound method of control through the WMA plan. Where populations are too high for the habitat, WMAs provide sound local data and encourage proper harvest. For landowners that lease their property for hunting, special hunting lease licenses are available at a significantly reduced cost to the landowner.

As the wildlife plan begins to work, members and family often turn into wildlife activists – pursuing, watching and appreciating the animals they are aiding. Landowners earnestly begin to address habitat, managing and enhancing the vegetation and supporting conditions that are essential to all forms of wildlife. There is nothing quite like the experience of seeing a quality buck on your place, or having a flock of mallards drop into a newly created wetland, or watching an active group of cedar waxwings feeding on berries in a brushy fence row.

Neighboring landowners can help reverse the decline in the quantity of wildlife habitat and improve the quality of the remaining habitat. WMAs can make a difference and help "Make Tracts for Texas Wildlife."

Through its Lone Star Land Steward Awards Program, TPWD recognizes the best examples of habitat management each year. The first statewide winner of this prestigious award was the North Central Fayette County Wildlife Management Association in 1995. This resulted in a new award category specifically for WMAs.

Summary

Five Steps to Forming a Wildlife Management Association

1. "Plant the seed" ...the power of suggestion; get someone to start talking to the neighbors. The word will spread.
2. "Cultivation" ...the initial meeting of landowners provides information, education and organization begins. Landowners, hunters and interested public are welcome.
3. "Birth" of the organization ...selection of leaders and formation of a steering committee (or vice-versa depending on participation).
4. "The law" ...statement of purpose and bylaws of the association; goals and objectives are established.
5. "In session" ...approval of bylaws, election of officers, establishment of member records (collection of dues) and agenda established. Annual meeting, fund raisers and other meetings are planned.

Five Potential Concerns for Wildlife Management Associations

1. Inadequate wildlife census information.
1. Consensus among members regarding goals and objectives.
2. Enthusiasm, interest or participation due to skepticism.
3. Attention to habitat.
4. Adequate wildlife census information.
5. Adequate wildlife harvest information.

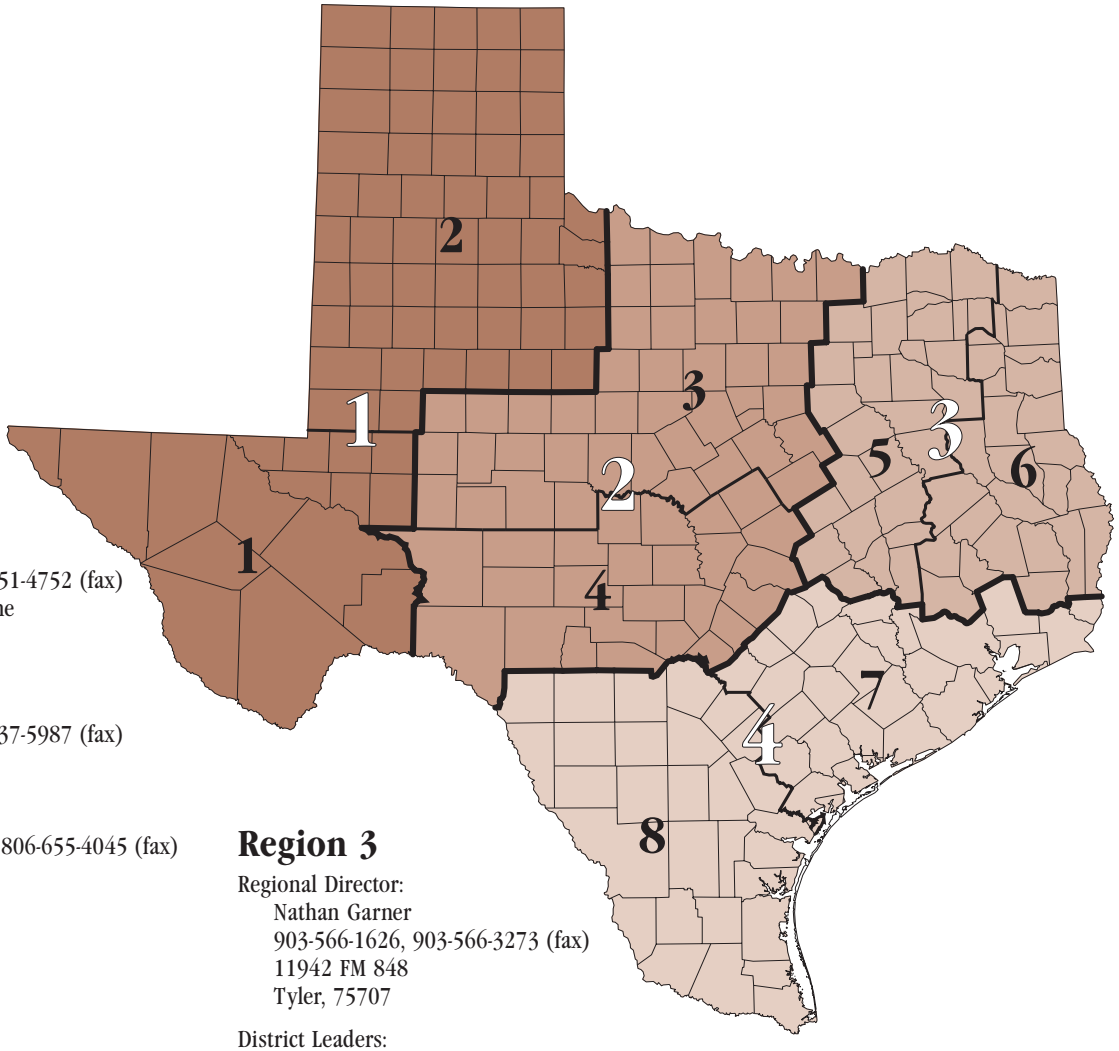
Five Potential Benefits to Landowners in Wildlife Management Associations

1. Personal knowledge gained through educational programs and materials.
2. Better steward of land (habitat).
3. Knowing the neighbors better and meeting new people – sharing common interests.
4. Improved quality and quantity of wildlife.
5. Decreased poaching.

Five Effects of Wildlife Management Associations on Ecosystems

1. Lessens the effect of fragmentation on habitat.
2. Focuses the management of animal species on realistic home range.
3. Provides a forum for ecosystem management education, that in time will affect the general "health" of the system, including better water management as a result of a properly functioning ecosystem.
4. Enhances habitat diversity through various forms and combinations of the basic wildlife management tools (cow, plow, ax, fire and gun). Reforestation and restoration of habitats would apply here.
5. Species diversity benefits from enhanced habitat management and population management through controlled harvest (hunting), as appropriate.

Wildlife Regions and Districts



Region 1

Regional Director:
Ruben Cantu
915-651-4748, 915-651-4752 (fax)
3407-B S. Chadbourne
San Angelo, 76904

District Leaders:
(1) Mike Hobson
915-837-2051, 915-837-5987 (fax)
1600 W. Hwy. 90
Alpine, 79830
(2) Danny Swepston
806-655-3782/3975, 806-655-4045 (fax)
P.O. Box 659
Canyon, 79015

Region 2

Regional Director:
Roy D. Welch
254-867-7970, 254-799-2583 (fax)
1601 East Crest
Waco, 76705

District Leaders:
(3) Kevin Mote
915-643-5977, 915-643-6192 (fax)
301 Main Street, Suite D
Brownwood, 76801
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/cross_timbers/
(4) Max Traweek
830-896-2500, 830-896-8335 (fax)
309 Sidney Baker South
Kerrville, 78028
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hillcountry/

Region 3

Regional Director:
Nathan Garner
903-566-1626, 903-566-3273 (fax)
11942 FM 848
Tyler, 75707

District Leaders:
(5) David Sierra
903-566-1626, 903-566-3273 (fax)
11942 FM 848
Tyler, 75707
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/post_oak/
(6) Gary Caulkins
409-384-6894, 409-384-7342 (fax)
1342 South Wheeler
Jasper, 75951
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/pineywood/

Region 4

Regional Director:
David Mabie
512-790-0306, 512-729-8940 (fax)
715 S. Hwy. 35
Rockport, 78382

District Leaders:
(7) Bob Carroll
409-968-6591, 409-968-3086 (fax)
3852 Pine Ridge Road
La Grange, 78945
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/oak_prairie/
(8) Joe Herrera
830-569-8700, 830-569-6400 (fax)
1607 2nd Street
Pleasanton, 78064
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/southtx_plain/

Sample WMA Questions and Answers, Goals, Bylaws, Landowner's Cooperative Agreement

Questions and Answers

1. What is a Wildlife Management Association/Co-op?
   A WMA is a group of interested landowners, hunters and wildlife enthusiasts who have organized to cooperatively manage their wildlife and its habitat.

2. Why should we form a WMA in our area?
   A. To improve your wildlife.
   B. To become informed of ways to benefit wildlife.
   C. To get to know our neighbors better.
   D. To help stop poaching.
   E. To become better land stewards.

3. What are the benefits?
   A. Improved quality and quantity of wildlife in the area.
   B. Tailored game harvest recommendations for the area.
   C. Neighbors visiting and sharing with each other.
   D. Renewed interest in a valuable resource.

4. What kind of an agreement is needed?
   A "non-binding agreement to cooperate" is asked to be signed by each member in the area.

5. What does the agreement say?
   The WMA agreement says that members will agree to cooperate with each other; that no one has the right to tell another member what to do with their land; that members will follow the harvest recommendations adopted by the WMA.

6. How big an area is needed for the WMA to work?
   There is no minimum size, however up to a certain point, the bigger the better. To maintain a commonality of interests and camaraderie, co-ops might want to restrict its boundaries to a geographic area where habitat types and landownership patterns are relatively similar. This does not prevent groups of co-ops from operating under a county-wide "umbrella" group.

7. How much does it cost?
   The WMA will ask for annual dues that will cover postage and administrative costs.

8. Who can be a member of a WMA?
   WMAs are open to anybody who is interested in wildlife and cares to come and participate.

Goals

The No Name Creek Wildlife Management Association was organized with the following goals in mind:

1. To bring the majority of the acreage within the boundaries of the WMA under proven successful wildlife management practices.

2. To make harvest recommendations for this area and all adjoining properties interested in the WMA.

3. To obtain accurate harvest records for the entire managed area.

4. To have better hunter/landowner relations and neighbor relations through education.

5. To encourage landowners in the WMA to become better educated about land management practices which enrich wildlife habitat and to encourage the implementation of those practices among landowners.

6. To encourage predator control.

7. To be a non-profit organization.

Bylaws

1. This Wildlife Management Association shall be called the No Name Creek Wildlife Management Association.

2. Wildlife numbers and quality will be enhanced through proper wildlife management practices as determined by the association.

3. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will be utilized as the lead resource for determining proper wildlife management practices.

4. "Proper wildlife management practices" include, but are not limited to:
   A. Habitat management
   B. Recommending harvest levels
   C. Maintaining accurate harvest records
   D. Providing population data through various census techniques
   E. Recommending supplemental or enhanced food supplies

5. The association members will be encouraged to help curtail illegal hunting by watching out for road hunting and night hunting and reporting such observed illegal hunting to their neighbors and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens.

6. The association will promote record keeping, and assist in gathering and maintaining population and harvest data.
   A. The association will establish and conduct spotlight surveys.
   B. Spotlight census data will be combined with casual observation reports and other available data to provide a good estimate of population densities and herd composition.
   C. Harvest records will be gathered and combined following hunting season.

7. Ongoing education of all members will serve to improve landowner/hunter relations as well as neighbor relations.

8. Association members should encourage their non-member neighbors to join the co-op in order to increase the land area being managed.

9. Three directors and three officers of the association will serve as the executive committee.
   A. This committee is elected at the first annual meeting of each new year which begins on September 1.
   B. Directors will be elected. One will serve three years, one will serve two years and one will serve one year.
   C. Directors can serve up to two consecutive terms.
   D. Officers will consist of president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer.
   E. Officers are elected for a one-year term and can succeed themselves in the same office one time.
   F. Active members of the organization will elect both directors and officers.
   G. Directors and officers will receive no financial compensation.

10. Annual membership dues will be $10.00. Additional donations will be accepted.
   A. Membership signs will be available to each member at cost.
   B. Dues will be assessed each year according to the needs of the association.
   C. Money will be used for postage, advertisement and educational programs.
   D. Membership will run from September 1 through August 31 each year.

11. Each member has one vote.

12. Membership is open to anyone interested in wildlife management.

13. These bylaws may be changed by 2/3 vote of membership present at any called meeting.

14. The No Name Creek Wildlife Management Association will establish a bank account at a local financial institution agreed upon by the president and secretary-treasurer of the Association.

15. All finances will be deposited in this account. Signatures of the secretary-treasurer and one other officer or director will be required on each check or withdrawal. In the event of WMA termination any money remaining in the account will be donated to the No Name Volunteer Fire Department.

16. **It is not necessary for every member of this WMA to agree with every objective and goal of the WMA, rather each member of the WMA does support the general principals of land and species conservation along with responsible agriculture production.**

Landowner's Cooperative Agreement

1. _____ _____
   Landowner's name Date

   _____ _____
   Address Telephone number

   _____ _____
   City State Zip code

2. I am the owner of tract or tracts of land located on:

   county/state/road_____ containing _____ acres,

   county/state/road_____ containing _____ acres,

   county/state/road_____ containing _____ acres,

3. I am the authorized agent of tract or tracts of land located on:

   county/state/road_____ containing _____ acres, owned by _____

   county/state/road_____ containing _____ acres, owned by _____

   county/state/road_____ containing _____ acres, owned by _____

4. I agree to cooperate with the goals and bylaws of the No Name Creek Wildlife Management Association.

5. This agreement does not give any unauthorized person the right to trespass on above listed property.

6. I am in no way obligated to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, or the No Name Creek Wildlife Management Association. I may or may not agree with the management practices recommended. The only thing I have agreed to is to recognize the need for wildlife management in order to improve the wildlife on my property.

7. This agreement is valid as long as I am a dues-paying member of the WMA.

8. Annual membership dues are $10.00 which will be used for postage, advertisement and educational programs.

_____
Signature of Landowner/Agent

Notes for your Association or Co-op

Making Tracts for TEXAS WILDLIFE

WILDLIFE RESTORATION

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744
1-800-792-1112
www.tpwd.state.tx.us

©2004 TPWD. PWD BK W7000-336 (12/03) In accordance with Texas State Depository Law, this publication is available at the Texas State Publications Clearinghouse and/or Texas Depository Libraries.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department receives federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any Texas Parks and Wildlife Department program, activity, or facility, or if you desire further information, please call or write: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office for Diversity and Civil Rights Programs - External Programs, 4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Webb 300, Arlington, VA 22203, (703) 358-1724.