



April 15, 2021

Dear TPWD Volunteers:

Life's better outside.®

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Carter P. Smith
Executive Director

First and foremost, I hope this letter finds you all safe, well, and healthy. Undoubtedly, between the challenges of coping with COVID-19 and our historic Texas winter weather, we have all confronted some rather unsettling times as of late.

If there has been a silver lining for me in the last year or so, it has unquestionably been seeing how many Texans and Texas families are connecting and re-connecting to the outdoors. For so many people, the use and enjoyment of the outdoors has been a welcome and necessary source of respite, as well as a place of mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Needless to say, activities such as boating, fishing, hunting, and park-going have simply exploded during the pandemic.

This phenomenon makes us appreciate even more our cadre of dedicated and talented volunteers who support TPWD's mission with your wisdom, time, passion and talents. It takes a special person who not only perseveres through such current challenges but commits to serve others and does so with characteristic humility, grace, and a smile. Thankfully, you are one of those people who have enabled TPWD to proudly continue carrying out its mission and programs, and to enhance the lives of countless Texans along the way.

Suffice to say, I am very grateful for all you have done to adapt during the pandemic. TPWD staff and volunteers readily entered a new era providing remote and virtual services to our customers. For instance, Texas Master Naturalist volunteers exhibited their resiliency by adapting their programs to accommodate virtual volunteering. Angler Education and Project WILD instructors developed online courses educating Texans about fishing and conservation. TPWD's 19 AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) Summer Associates creatively continued outreach safely for limited site visitors and connected people with the natural world from the safety of their home via online trail walks, story times and interpretive programs. As we progressed down this new path, many volunteers continued to serve in the field adapting seamlessly to requisite safety protocols.

Please take pride in the fact that through your volunteer efforts you are instilling a spirit of conservation in Texans young and old by enhancing stewardship of our great state's natural and cultural resources. You facilitate critical hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the state. Volunteers like you are often the ones who teach a child to catch their first fish, shoot their first arrow, pitch their first tent, or take their first hike. These outdoor "firsts" create memories for a lifetime.

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On behalf of TPWD, I want to let you know how deeply grateful we are for your service. I thought you might also want to know that in 2020, you and your fellow volunteers contributed 877,000 hours to conservation and recreation. This is equal to 422 full-time employees and has an estimated value of more than \$ 23.8 million! I would like to personally express my appreciation to each of you who do so much for our home ground and for all of us who live and visit here.

I appreciate you for caring about our wild things and wild places. They need you now more than ever. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Carter Smith
Executive Director

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