

HUNTING

A Valuable Texas Tradition

I hope to leave [my children] good health, an education, and possibly even a competence. But what are they going to do with these things if there be no more deer in the hills, and no more quail in the coverts? No more snipe whistling in the meadow, no more piping of widgeons and chattering of teal as darkness covers the marshes; no more whistling of swift wings when the morning star pales in the east? And when the dawn-wind stirs through the ancient cottonwoods, and the gray light steals down from the hills over the old river sliding softly past its wide brown sandbars – what if there be no more goose music? – *Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (1949)*



BOUNTIFUL WILDLIFE, LASTING BENEFITS

Texas is known for its fabulous hunting. Each year, residents and visitors alike flock to ranches, leases and public areas to seek out whitetails, boars, turkeys, quail and dove. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, each year Texas has over **1.2 million hunters** aged 16 and older who spend over **14.1 million days hunting**.^{*} Each year, hunting accounts for **\$1.761 billion in retail sales**, **31,711 jobs**, **state sales tax revenues of \$93 million** and **federal income taxes of \$148 million**. These numbers give hunting in Texas a **total economic output of \$3.368 billion**.^{**}

But the true value of hunting is greater than the money it brings to our state. In 1949, Aldo Leopold, a passionate hunter and arguably the greatest modern American conservationist, recognized that even if we put an economic value on hunting, there is something more important than dollars that can be lost as our lands, wetlands and waterways are put to other uses.



Success Story: Let's Talk Turkey

Funded by a federal excise tax on some sporting arms combined with a matched percentage from the states, the Wildlife Restoration Program benefits sportsmen, hunters and everyone who enjoys the outdoors. One of the program's greatest successes in Texas has been an increase in Eastern turkey population. In 1979, there were almost no wild turkeys left in East Texas. However, a \$5 license stamp that turkey hunters must buy funded the purchase and release of 7,200 wild turkeys into East Texas. By 2002, the turkey population had grown such that there is now limited turkey hunting allowed in 40 counties.

HUNTING SPURS CONSERVATION

Where will we be as a state and people if we fail to take into account the spiritual, physical and mental values that flow from the opportunities of friends and family going outdoors together into the crisp chatter of autumn or the cold dawn of winter? The true hunting experience embraces the meaning of conservation. All of the benefits Leopold spoke of are in play: recognition of wildlife and habitat in natural settings, coupled with the knowledge that these conditions can only exist if they are appreciated and stewarded — an appreciation that must be passed on by one person to another.

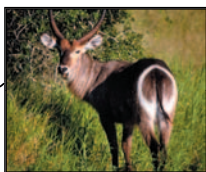
A 2003 study funded by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife found that 92 percent of children who hunt come from hunting families, but that only 25 percent of families who hunt took their children with them. We have a huge opportunity to involve those other children in hunting activities and deepen their enjoyment of Texas' natural beauty.

* <http://southwest.fws.gov/fedaid/wrTX.html> ** The 2001 Economic Benefits of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Watching in Texas, Southwick Associates, Inc., March 2003 *** <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/land/urban.html>

LOST HABITATS, LOST OPPORTUNITIES

It's unfortunate that with each passing year, more and more of our wildlife habitats fall before competing interests with an assumed higher economic value. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 2.2 million acres of Texas' rural lands were converted to urban uses between 1982 to 1997. Texas already leads all other states in the loss of rural farming and ranching lands, and our annual rate of conversion is growing.***

There are still great areas of the state on private and public lands where hunting opportunities remain, but we must steward them wisely. Preservation can only result from careful management and continued awareness of the value, both economic and social, that hunting brings. To not do so, surely will mean that there will no longer be goose music... Where there are no longer geese, there can no longer be the golden egg.



Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. © 2004

If you would like more information about conservation in Texas, contact the Texas Coalition for Conservation at txcoalition@aol.com, fax (512) 349-2439, or phone (512) 349-2449.