

Texas voters approve \$172 million in parks and recreation bonds

(November 8, 2013) AUSTIN – Voters in 10 Texas cities and counties on Tuesday approved a total of \$172 million in bonds to support local parks and recreation facilities, according to an analysis by Environment Texas. The group pointed to the elections as evidence of strong public support for parks funding and called on the state of Texas to do more to help local and state parks.

“Parks and recreation won big on the ballot this week,” said Environment Texas Director Luke Metzger. “At a time when many parks are suffering and natural areas are quickly being eaten up by sprawl, millions of Texans put their money where their mouth is and made a big investment in green spaces, water quality, ball fields, bike trails and in our overall quality of life.”

Metzger contrasted the strong support for parks funding of local governments with that of the Texas Legislature’s.

“Local governments are clearly doing their part and it’s time for the state to step up”, said Metzger. “If there was any doubt left in the Legislature’s mind about public support for Texas parks, the votes this week should clear that up. Texans want a state with abundant parkland for recreation, where our rivers and streams are protected, and where wildlife has a place to survive and thrive.”

In 2013, the Texas Legislature restored much of the budget cuts made to parks programs in 2011, but some programs remain significantly underfunded. The Local Parks Grant Program, which provides matching grants from the state to support local parks projects, received \$15.5 million over two years, half the amount it received in 2009. And despite an admonition by Texas Tech researchers that Texas will need to acquire 1 million acres of land by 2030 to keep up with public demand for parks, the Legislature has not funded a program to create new state parks.

Environment Texas pointed to settlement money coming to Texas as part of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster as a key opportunity to invest in coastal parkland and other conservation programs. Under the RESTORE Act approved by Congress, Texas could receive as much as \$1 billion to invest in coastal restoration. Governor Perry has appointed Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Commissioner Toby Baker to administer the funds.

“The BP money offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest in Texas’ natural heritage,” said Metzger. “It’s critical that Texas use the money exclusively for coastal restoration programs, including efforts to restore our bays and estuaries, protect our beaches and create new coastal parks.”

The parks bonds on the ballot this week included:

1. Round Rock

- a. Proposition 2: \$56.5 million for extension of hike and bike trails, add sports fields, and renovate soccer fields at Old Settlers Park, expand Rock ‘N River water park, and other various park repairs and renovations.
- b. 56.58% approval

2. Williamson County

- a. Prop 2: \$40 million parks and recreation uses initiative

- i. Brushy Creek Regional Trail, River Ranch County Park, Blackland Heritage Park, and Taylor Rodeo Arena are the parks that are going to get upgrades
- b. 55% approval

3. Friendswood

- a. Proposition 3: \$7.285 million tax bonds for the purpose of designing, improving, and expanding parks and recreational facilities in the city, and the acquisition of land and interests in land for such purposes, including improvements to and expansion of, Centennial Park, Lake Friendswood, Sports Park, Stevenson Park and acquisition and improvement of land for new parks in the city
- b. 58% approval

4. Seguin

- a. Proposition 2: \$5 million for renovations to Max Starcke and Manuel C Castilla park, and designing and creating new park on Hoermann property
- b. 65% approval

5. Bedford

- a. Proposition 1: \$3,200,000 in General Obligation Bonds for park improvements (Boys Ranch Lake improvements, trail improvements, channel improvements, recreation facilities, and related improvements at Boys Ranch Park
- b. 61.74% approval

6. Sugar Land

- a. Proposition 1: \$18.5 million referendum for the creation of a 65-acre park in the Telfair community
 - i. Did not pass: no votes: 51%, yes votes: 49%
- b. Proposition 2: \$21.3 million referendum for the second phase of Brazos River park and an adjacent festival site
 - i. Second phase of the Brazos River Park, 128 acres featuring a multi-purpose lake, a boathouse, shelters, restrooms, pavilions and hike/bike trails, as well as an adjacent festival site meant to accommodate large scale events
 - ii. 53% approval
- c. Proposition 3: \$10.1 million allocation for a 10-mile series of connecting series of bike and hike trails
 - i. 52% approval

7. Bellaire

- a. Proposition 3: \$5 million for construction and improvements for Evelyn's Park

- i. Votes for: 2,271
 - ii. Votes against: 947
- b. Proposition 4: \$500,000 improvements for the Nature Discovery Center Building and improvement to the ground of Russ Pitman Park
 - i. Votes for: 2485
 - ii. Votes against: 725

8. Carrollton

- a. Proposition 4: \$8.545 million for general parks and recreation improvements
- b. 80% approval

9. Coppell

- a. The passage of the proposition means that the city can now use surplus money collected by the half-cent sales tax for projects not originally included. New projects and continued maintenance of recreational facilities already in place will be funded by the half-cent sales tax
- b. 63% approval

10. McAllen

- a. Proposition 3: Proposition 3 also called for \$15,000,000 in bonds for acquiring, constructing and equipping parks and recreation improvements, including but not limited to a sports complex and battlefields.
- b. 54% approval

11. Amarillo

- a. Amarillo Recreation Center Bond: The issuance of \$31,500,000 general obligation bonds for park and recreation facilities.
- b. The bond failed; yes: 46% no: 54%

12. Pecos

- a. Proposition 3: \$2,500,000 for the purpose of renovating, improving and equipping a City park, with said bonds to mature, bear interest, and be issued and sold in accordance with law at the time of issuance, all within the discretion of the City Council
- b. Proposition failed: Yes: 26% No 74%