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STUDY SHOWS TEXAS VOTERS MAINTAIN STRONG SUPPORT FOR STATE PARKS

70 percent of voters would support constitutional amendment to fund state parks

DALLAS—A new survey today released by Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation showed overwhelming voter support of a strong, well-funded system of state parks. The poll demonstrates consistent support in good and bad economic times, and shows that voters would support a constitutional amendment to dedicate sales tax revenue for more and consistent funding for parks.

“Conservation and the importance of preserving our natural habitat are deeply held Texas values,” said Dan Allen Hughes, Chairman of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. “Texas voters understand that a strong and thriving system of state parks contributes to a vibrant economy, is an important source of recreation for Texas families and helps protect the natural environment that makes Texas unique,” Hughes said. “In times of rapid economic and population growth it is more important than ever to preserve and protect the natural habitat that has made Texas such an attractive place to live, work and build a business.”

CONSERVATION IS A BEDROCK BELIEF

The statewide survey of 600 active voters was conducted by Hill Research Consultants from December 2-4, 2014. The poll queried voters on issues related to Texas land, parks, natural habitat and other natural areas. This is the fifth time since 1999 that Hill Research Consultants has conducted a survey of Texas voters to assess opinions on these issues. Over time, voter support has remained strong even in times of economic downturn.

“Texans’ sentiment on these issues has remained remarkably stable over the past decade, suggesting that these opinions are more than transient views—they are closer to bedrock beliefs and values that persist for a generation or more,” said Dr. David B. Hill. “Voters continue to be very aware of the need for conservation efforts and parkland in our growing state.”

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In the most recent poll, an overwhelming 84 percent of all voters agreed with the statement: “Unless we protect Texas’ natural areas, we will lose the very things that make Texas a special place in which to live.” This level of support for conservation of Texas’ natural areas has been consistently above 80 percent since 1999.

Significant and encouraging findings of the poll include:

- 92 percent of voters agree that public parks are especially important to families needing an affordable recreational outlet
- 84 percent see parks as “essential” to healthy, active lifestyles for Texans
- 84 percent acknowledge the need for protecting natural areas

SUPPORT FOR SPORTING GOODS SALES TAX INTENSIFIES

Consistent with the 2012 poll, 76 percent of voters support using revenue from the sporting goods sales tax for “acquiring, maintaining and operating state and local parks.” The sporting goods sales tax is not a new or separate tax; it is that portion of sales tax revenue generated from the sale of outdoor sporting goods. The percentage of voters who report “strong” support for the tax has risen from 35 percent in 2009, to 43 percent in 2014.

Additionally, voters want the revenue to be used for the purpose in which it was intended. A strong 72 percent of voters disapprove of the current diversion of tax revenue from the parks. Since passage of the legislation in 1993, the State of Texas has collected more than \$2 billion in sporting goods sales tax revenues, yet only 36 percent has been appropriated for parks.

“Texans are straight shooters, and this study confirms what we have known for years,” said George Bristol, chair of the Texas State Parks Advisory Committee. “Texans love their parks and want their hard-earned tax dollars used as promised to develop a system that all Texas families can be proud of. The state parks are in desperate need of increased funding to modernize, expand and further protect our state parks, and the good news is that the sales tax revenue exists – we just need to spend it on the parks as intended.”

In addition, the survey found that 80 percent of voters support using revenue collected from the outdoor sporting goods tax to acquire additional land for the public to use for the purposes of hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, camping, hiking, kayaking and canoeing.

SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT IS STRONG

The poll queried Texans’ opinions on supporting a constitutional amendment to permanently dedicate sufficient sales tax revenue generated from outdoor sporting goods to fund the parks budget. The results were loud and clear: Texans would vote “yes” on a constitutional amendment. In fact 70 percent indicated they would vote yes, which is well above the typical threshold of 58 percent support that typically signals likely passage of an amendment.

Importantly, support for a constitutional amendment is bipartisan with Republicans and Democrats supporting a potential amendment. As with other poll questions, voters support for this has remained consistently strong over time.

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