



# WATER FOR THE TEXAS COAST

**The Texas Gulf Coast is home to incredible saltwater fishing and waterfowl hunting, but many important habitats have already been lost—and more are at risk.**

Texas has seven major coastal estuaries, or bays, formed where fresh water from rivers mixes with the saltier water of the Gulf of Mexico. This mixture of salt and fresh water, and the sediments and nutrients from the fresh water, is vital for fish, shrimp, oysters, crabs and many species of birds. It is the engine behind Texas' \$1.8 billion recreational fishing economy.

At the same time, Texas is growing faster than any other state in the nation. Projections indicate that many of the state's bays could end up deprived of freshwater, particularly in drier times. If we act now we could avoid serious long-term damage.

In Texas, like much of the West, the concept of leaving water for fish and wildlife has been controversial. Water left in a river to flow out into an estuary or the Gulf of Mexico was once commonly described as 'wasted.' Now we know better.

Texas will receive millions from BP's oil spill fines and penalties, once the federal lawsuit is resolved. This money could be used to protect some of the water flowing in Texas' rivers and into Texas' bays. This could be done while making sure that other water needs are also met.

**Guaranteeing Texas' bays sufficient fresh water during droughts is one of the most important things we can do to protect the Texas Gulf Coast for future generations.**



## TEXAS BY THE NUMBERS

**\$1.8 billion**

annual economic impact of recreational saltwater fishing in Texas

**4+ million**

waterfowl winter on the Texas Gulf Coast in a good year

**2.6 million**

Texans hunt and fish

**200,000**

coastal wetland acres lost in Texas between the mid 1950s and the early 1990s

**97 percent**

of the Gulf's commercial fish and shellfish that rely on coastal estuaries and wetlands

**70 percent**

of Texas coastal residents want BP's oil spill fines to be used mainly on restoration, not other priorities

# Dedicating BP oil spill funds towards improving the health of Texas' bays will benefit hunting, fishing and wildlife.

## Saltwater Fishing

Most of Texas' prized saltwater fish—including spotted seatrout, redfish, black drum, and flounder—are dependent on estuaries for at least part of their lifecycle. Keeping our bays healthy by protecting freshwater inflows, and restoring reefs, marshes and seagrass beds, will protect and enhance a \$1.8 billion saltwater recreational fishing economy.

## Fixing the Food Web

An adult oyster can filter as much as fifty gallons of water a day and oyster reefs provide habitat for well over one hundred species of marine life. Yet more than half of the oyster reefs have disappeared from most Texas bays. Rebuilding and restoring oyster reefs will measurably increase the amount of fish in our waters. But oysters need a mix of fresh water and saltwater to survive. Shrimp and blue crabs also need enough fresh water to reproduce. In fact, much of the Gulf's economically important marine life would benefit if we restored the estuaries where the food web begins.

## Waterfowl

Texas winters as much as 90 percent of the ducks and 75 percent of snow geese in the Central Flyway. A substantial number of these birds are found on the coast. For example, eighty percent of the North American redhead population winters in the Laguna Madre on the Texas/Mexico border. Mottled ducks are year-round residents on the Texas Coast and their numbers have declined by roughly two-thirds over the past decades—in large part due to the decline in freshwater wetlands and marsh habitats.

## Benefits for All

Texas' coastal counties have over 4,000 tourism-related businesses and nearly 17,000 associated jobs. Furthermore, healthy reefs, wetlands and barrier islands are our first line of defense to slow down storm surges and blunt the force of high winds during storms and hurricanes.



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