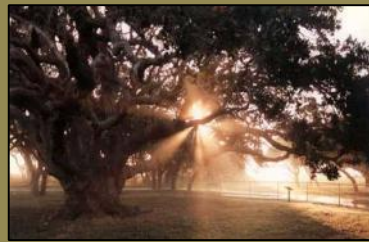

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
PARK SYSTEM STUDY
TEXAS STATE PARK SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Prepared by:



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The process of completing this project required the engagement and advocacy of many, as this *Development Plan* reflects the insight and expertise of leadership from across the State of Texas. The Consultant Team of Fisher Heck Architects and PROS Consulting would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations for their input, guidance, and contributions made to support the completion of this project:

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Executive Summary

The Texas State Park System has enjoyed a legacy of being widely respected among peer state park systems around the United States for the quality and uniqueness of its assets, the innovations of its management practices, the superb customer service present at all state parks, and the quality of its personnel and staff. Over the last 30 years, however, the quality of Texas State Park facilities has steadily deteriorated as a result of increased usage, aging assets, environmental impacts, and diminished funding available to stay abreast of facility needs. As a result, increasing pressure has been placed on Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to facilitate improvement of the performance of Texas State Parks and the conditions of their facilities.

This *Development Plan* has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Rider 31 of House Bill 1 of the 80th Texas Legislature to conduct a *Park System Study* directed to identify strategies and tactics necessary to return Texas State Parks to a “high quality park system.” The contents and findings of this report are the result of extensive research and analysis into evolving public needs, community expectations of Texas State Parks, the existing conditions of state park facilities and infrastructure, and industry best practices from around the nation.

In the course of conducting the *Park System Study* there were six (6) predominant findings that emerged as the key issues this *Development Plan* works to address. These key issues are detailed in this Executive Summary.



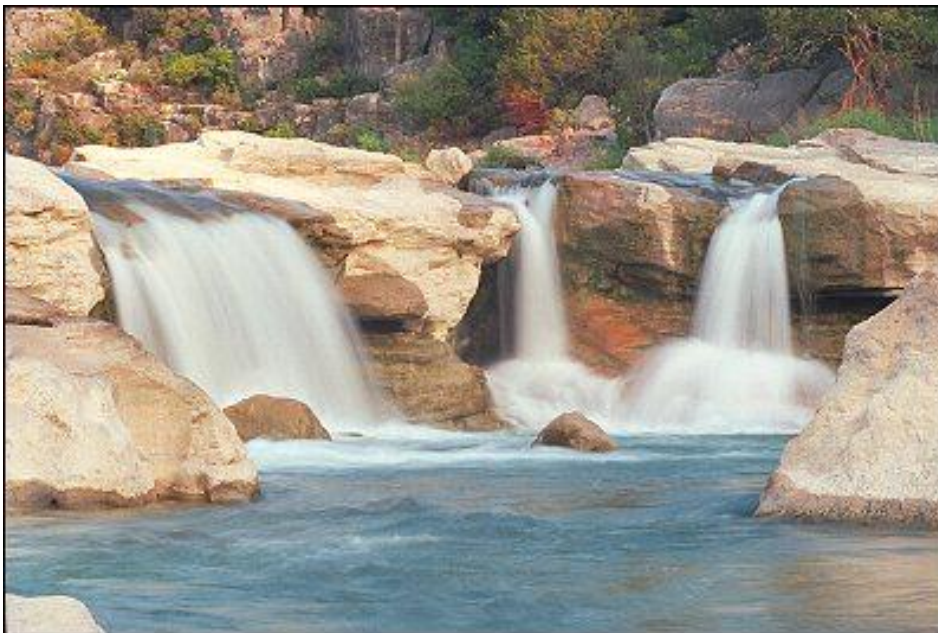
DEFINING A HIGH QUALITY PARK AND PARK SYSTEM

Clearly defining the characteristics of a high quality park system and individual parks within it was a primary objective of this *Park System Study*. The Consultant Team, with meaningful input from TPWD, combined the best practices of known high performing state park systems around the United States with the unique nuances of the Texas State Park System to derive a definition of what constitutes a high quality state park and state park system here in Texas. While the details of this definition are provided immediately following the executive summary in this report, the elements that define a high quality park and park system were determined to include:

1. A vision unfettered by political, operational, or financial circumstances of how a high quality park should look and feel to visitors, and the value provided to the general public.
2. Standards for how parks and the park system provide for safe, enjoyable, and meaningful use by all sectors of the general public.
3. Standards for how parks and the park system provide value to local communities.
4. Standards for how parks and the park system are operated and maintained.
5. Standards for how parks and the park system pursue development and acquisition.

These standards are detailed later in this report, and utilized to evaluate the individual park units and the Texas State Park System on the whole.

Once the recommended definition of what constitutes a high quality park and park system is applied to Texas State Parks, there are a relatively small number of parks that currently meet these standards. This is not meant to detract from the superb customer service and efforts of state park staff as the issues are predominantly facility and infrastructure related. There is great potential for Texas State Parks to meet these standards by addressing the critical issue of improvements to the existing facilities and infrastructure necessary to elevate the status of the Texas State Park System to meet the definition of high quality. As noted throughout this *Development Plan*, this is recommended to be the highest priority for TPWD and state leadership.



IMPROVE EXISTING FACILITIES FIRST

The Texas State Park System faces the obstacle of having sites and facilities distributed over nearly 269,000 square miles across the State of Texas. These facilities have been acquired and developed to represent the highlights and uniqueness of Texas landscapes, natural environments, wildlife, our history and culture, and our contributions as a state to the United States of America. A large portion of facilities within the Texas State Park System were developed from the efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the early parts of the 20th century. Other facilities were developed later, but are approaching the age of between 30 to 50 years. These assets have been enjoyed by Texans and visitors to the state for many decades, which has contributed to their quality becoming eroded over time. Additionally, the nature of the Texas climate is harsh and has subjected state park facilities to environmental pressures that continue to quicken the deterioration of our assets.

Given the current state of existing facilities, it is imperative that the first priority of TPWD and state leadership be to address the need to return our state park assets to their former status of being high quality. When conducting leadership interviews around the state, community leaders frequently commented on the desire to see our state parks regain the quality they exhibited in the 1960's and 1970's. The efforts and resources necessary to invest in new and excited developments for purposes of increasing the revenue generating capacity of TPWD should not overshadow the imperative priority to "fix what we have." While both are important, this *Development Plan* places a high priority on addressing and improving the conditions of existing facilities and infrastructure at Texas State Parks.



The Consultant Team recommends in this *Development Plan* that TPWD alter the current *modus operandi* of TPWD for requesting funding to support facility needs. The recommended methodology for requesting appropriations supporting facility and infrastructure maintenance and improvements reflects the industry best practice of an annual reinvestment in assets based upon a estimated total value of assets excluding land value. The Consultant Team recommendation is to invest four percent (4%) of the total value of state park assets annually into capital repair and replacement projects. The scope of this annual reinvestment package should include:

- Minor repair, maintenance and prudent upgrades of structures, infrastructure, and park assets including but not limited to buildings, restrooms, shelters, group facilities, fishing piers, pavilions, utilities, roads, parking, boat ramps, camp sites, picnic sites, playgrounds, and trails
- Major capital projects including repair and replacement, maintenance and prudent upgrades of structures, infrastructure, and park assets including but not limited to buildings, restrooms, shelters, group facilities, fishing piers, pavilions, utilities, roads, parking, boat ramps, camp sites, picnic sites, playgrounds, and trails

A conservative estimate derived by the Consultant Team of the total value of state park facilities and capital assets, not including land value, is \$808,839,915. Resultantly, a responsible level of ongoing funding to improve the conditions of existing facilities and infrastructure and to address ongoing maintenance requirements is approximately \$65,000,000 per biennium. A detailed description of these recommendations is contained within this *Development Plan*.

In summary, there are estimated to be \$225,375,000 in specific known and current projects that will improve and upgrade the conditions at Texas State Parks as of today, and therefore improve the ability of Texas State Parks to meet public need and generate revenues. It is anticipated that in the course of the upcoming 10 years additional projects will arise throughout the system that are not currently identified in response to environmental conditions and heavy public use of facilities. As a result, it is the recommendation of the Consultant Team that TPWD and state leadership abandon the approach of attempting to derive an accurate accounting of all deferred maintenance and needed improvements at Texas State Parks at any one time. It is far more productive and meaningful for TPWD to focus on the best and most prioritized use of its biennial appropriations for capital repair, replacement, and upgrades. This new approach will allow TPWD to spend valuable staff resources that are in short supply on working to alleviate known facility and infrastructure issues that are preventing Texas State Parks for achieving and maintaining the standard of a high quality park system.

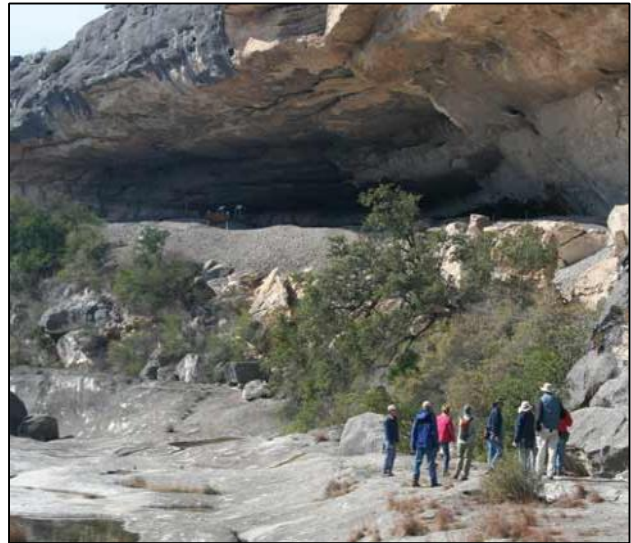
It is estimated that these projects will contribute to additional annual earned revenues of approximately \$3,600,000, once all new improvements and upgrades are complete. It is the position of the Consultant Team that the potential gains from revenues generated from new development areas detailed within this report are dependent upon the improved and upgraded conditions addressed through these specific projects. This potential, however, is dependent on a number of additional issues discussed within this Executive Summary.



DISCONTINUE MANAGING FROM A DEFENSIVE POSITION

The pressures placed upon TPWD over the last several years to improve the performance and facilities of Texas State Parks have created an atmosphere of frustration for both the agency and state leadership. While these pressures are necessary and appropriate to maintain the accountability of the agency, the growing demands on public resources for alternative priorities other than parks and the subsequent diminished operational and capital funding available to TPWD over the last 20 years has aggravated the perceived success of the agency to maintain a high quality state park system.

The current leadership of TPWD and the senior management of Texas State Parks are wholly dedicated to being good stewards of our parks and the experiences they provide to the citizens of the State of Texas. Likewise, the Consultant Team has found state park staff throughout the system to have only the best intentions for managing these public assets and the safety of state park users. The challenges of the last few years have created a mantra heard throughout the system of, “We’ve done so much with so little for so long that we can do anything with nothing.” While this attitude is respectable, it is indicative of a much larger and looming issue derived from having insufficient resources to meet the expectations of state leadership and the general public.



TPWD suffers the challenge of attracting and keeping the best and brightest professionals to be a part of the Texas State Park System. Not to detract from the quality of personnel currently employed by Texas State Parks, but the ability of the system to navigate to a bright future greatly depends upon succession planning that can recruit and retain the next generation of innovative thinkers and park managers.

This *Development Plan* does not veer from the difficult and provocative issue of addressing the current culture that exists within the State Park Division of TPWD. It was noted by the Consultant Team that many field staff perceive themselves as underserved within the agency because of their slow and often insignificant adjustments in compensation, their old and deteriorated equipment, and their predicament of having needs that severely outpace the resources to address them. The management team at TPWD works very hard to proactively eliminate this damaging sentiment, but will require the support of the legislature and state leadership to continue sufficient funding to address the realities of improving the conditions of the state park system and retaining the quality personnel necessary to achieve the vision of a high quality park system.

Ultimately, the responsibility for discontinuing the management of Texas State Parks from a defensive position is shared by many. Evolving this culture for the shared benefit of the general public and our state park system must be a collective priority for legislative leadership, agency leadership, state park leadership, and all staff within the state park system. It is recommended that the strategies employed by TPWD management, TPWD field staff, and state leadership to improve the culture of how the state parks are perceived include a short list of basic principles – lead by example, positive reinforcement, strict accountability, calculated risk taking, and shared values.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING

It is not unique to TPWD that the traditional methods and media for promoting our state parks have proven to be increasingly ineffective. The Consultant Team finds that this issue pervades most park systems across the country and represents an old approach to a modern problem. Traditionally, park communications and messaging is implemented through a framework and platform that is intended to *inform* the users, or customers, about the park and its assets. Resultantly, most members of the public can recite what any park brochure or publication generally looks like without looking for reference.

In the 21st century our parks are competing with a multitude of alternative opportunities the public can choose to spend their disposable time and money on. These competitive interests include indoor malls, amusement parks, sports leagues, cinemas, arcades, and even home-based video games. The times of being able to successfully motivate users to get outside and go to our state parks by *informing* them of the facilities and opportunities available are behind us. Today's public must be *inspired* to get outside and visit our state parks. This is a fundamental shift in the creative and marketing platform that shapes the communications and messaging necessary for all park systems to succeed in sustaining and increasing park visitation.



This *Development Plan* provides basic recommendations to TPWD regarding how the agency can stay within its mission, mandates, and existing value system while transforming its communications and messaging strategies. It is imperative, however, that an initial effort to improve existing conditions be completed before launching a reinvigorated promotional campaign centered on the state parks. Inspiring new visitors to certain state parks featuring deteriorated facilities can result in future challenges to keep those users engaged and manage the messaging around Texas State Parks being a high quality system. The implementation of improved communications and messaging must therefore be carefully and strategically executed.

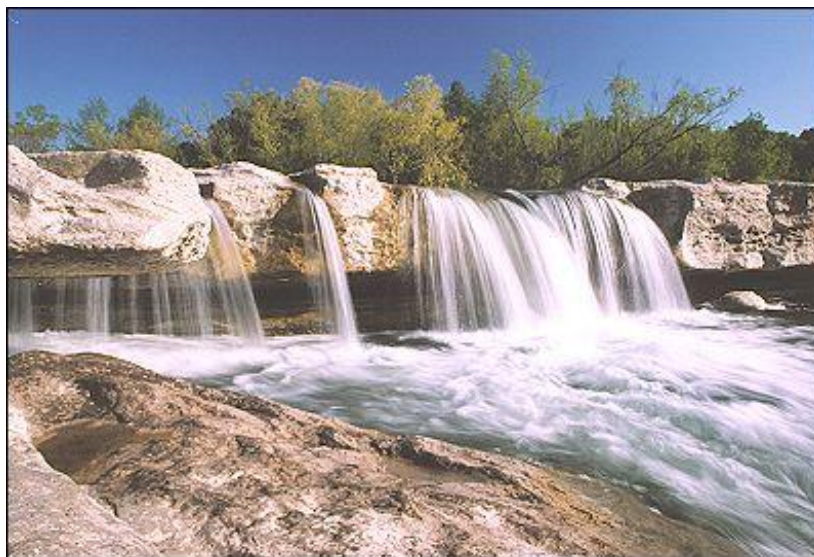
NEW DEVELOPMENTS TO GENERATE REVENUE AND MEET PUBLIC NEEDS

One of the desired outcomes of the *Park System Study* is to identify new and prudent development opportunities that can improve the revenue generating capacity of our state parks and better meet public needs. This is a critical element of this *Development Plan*, but not a primary focus. As stated previously in this summary of issues, the primary focus of capital investment initially should be to improve the conditions of existing facilities and infrastructure. With dedication to this concern, the next priority for capital investment should be to pursue responsible new development that generates revenues and meet public needs.

The findings of the Consultant Team after intense study of the Texas State Park System are that new developments should be identified and pursued strategically for purposes of utilizing short term successes at select facilities to raise the profile and ultimate success of the entire system. This approach builds a “scaffold” upon which further investment in the future can be afforded. It is also important to maintain a balance of new development between the efforts to meet public need and development that is compatible to each site relative to the natural and cultural resources.

The recommendations contained within this report offer innovative approaches to current ideas of how new development can be responsibly managed for great benefit. This approach is an attempt to achieve substantial positive impact from carefully selected investment opportunities in our state parks. There are numerous cases of state parks within the system that cannot improve their revenue generation without the addition of appropriate new development. Conversely, some of the development recommendations within this report are not primarily for purposes of generating significant revenues, but are provided in order to address known and expressed public need. The critical aspect of prioritizing new developments is to maintain a proper balance between these two purposes.

In summary, there are estimated \$211,360,000 in specific new development projects that will improve the ability of Texas State Parks to meet public need, and contribute to additional annual earned revenues of approximately \$4,700,000, once all new developments are complete and operational. It is recommended that select new development projects as identified in this *Development Plan* can be pursued in partnership with other public entities or private organizations. These cases can prove to reduce the capital outlay of TPWD in order to complete the development projects.



PHASED IMPLEMENTATION AND LAYERED PLANNING

The final key issue addressed by the recommendations of this *Development Plan* spring from the need to protect the legacy of these recommendations and the long-term success of the Department. In order to ensure that this *Park System Study* provides more than short term benefits, it is critical and necessary that TPWD initiate phased implementation of the recommendations contained herein, consistently monitor progress and measure performance, and pursue additional layered planning to strengthen the strategies and tactics employed by state parks throughout the system.

The Consultant Team strongly believes the ultimate success of the Texas State Park System in meeting the expectations of the Texas Legislature resides in thorough business planning for all park regions and eventually all parks within the system. These plans should be developed over time out of respect for limited resources, and should support the strategic direction of the system on the whole. Likewise, the ability of TPWD to meet all public demands for parks and recreation through the state park system cannot be achieved at once. As a result, this *Development Plan* provides a recommended phased approach to achieving milestones and ultimate success to become a high quality park system once again.



