Texas Prairie Wetlands Project

Ducks Unlimited
TEXAS GULF COAST, TEXAS

AFTER TRAVELING HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS OF MILES during migration, millions of ducks, geese, and other migratory birds seek shelter along the Texas coast to rest their weary wings. However, changing rural landscapes have created a scarcity of suitable wetlands for these birds to rest and refuel, resulting in declining healthy populations. The Ducks Unlimited Texas Prairie Wetlands Project, active now for over 25 years, is an example of how public-private partnerships can work to change that trend. Established in 1991, the program has been working with private landowners to restore, enhance, and protect shallow, seasonally flooded wetland habitat on private lands in 28 counties along the Texas Gulf Coast.

This project is important to the Texas Coast because there is a substantial deficit of available wintering waterfowl habitat. Each year, TPWP properties provide critical staging and wintering habitat for thousands of waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and other wetland-dependent species. These projects also serve as important breeding and brood rearing habitat for resident Mottled Ducks, the only non-migratory dabbling ducks in the continental US, and Black Bellied Whistling Ducks. Beyond wildlife habitat, wetlands also provide ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, stormwater retention and flood prevention, water filtration, and more. These small wetland basins are important to regional water quality because they are great tools for preventing excess contaminants and sediments from entering local waterways.

Due to the fact that 97% of the land in Texas is privately owned, TPWP’s work with landowners on these private landscapes are critical to meeting the foraging needs of waterfowl. TPWP provides cost-share assistance to private landowners and technical advice from Ducks Unlimited and partners to assist landowners in these developments.
MISSION
With a need to support 5.6 million birds along the Texas Coast, TPWP provides cost-share assistance to private landowners for levee construction, the purchase and installation of water control structures, and other infrastructure developments. Landowners also receive technical advice (biological and engineering services) from the partner groups, and construction management services to help ensure quality control and long-term structural integrity of these projects. Each project makes a commitment to the TPWP initiative for a 10-25-year period. The multitude of partners in this initiative ensures its success. By collaborating through TPWP, each partner’s individual goals are met faster than if each entity worked alone.

The ultimate goal of the TPWP is to utilize public-private partnerships to restore or enhance wetland habitats along the Gulf Coast of Texas to continually expand available habitat for waterfowl, as well as increase ecosystem services benefits for coastal residents through water filtration, carbon sequestration, and floodwater retention.

IMPACT
The Texas Prairie Wetlands Project has delivered over 85,000 acres of wetland restoration/enhancements for wintering waterfowl and worked with 686 landowners on the Texas Coast. These acres are equivalent to 130 square miles – this is about equal to the part of Houston inside the 610 loop. The program is ongoing with about 30 projects totaling at least 3,000 acres of wetland enhancement and restoration completed each year.

The habitat types TPWP enhances (rice, moist soil, palustrine emergent wetlands) provide substantial foraging resources for waterfowl and shore birds. One acre of managed habitat can provide about 1,766 Duck Energy Days (DED)—that’s enough “food energy” on an acre to support one duck for 1,766 days or 1,766 ducks for one day. A recent study by the GCJV showed that the habitat provided through the TPWP represents up to 23% of the available wetland habitat on the Texas Mid-Coast and Chenier Plain. This habitat in turn fuels a thriving outdoors industry in the state. Texas boasts more than 2.7 million hunters and anglers (2011 report, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation) who spend more than $4.1 billion on their recreational pursuits. This group supports almost 66,000 jobs in the state.

Texan by Nature is working with TPWP to help DU expand its outreach and influence along the Texas coast, resulting in increased acres impacted and developing the premier model for landowner engagement in wetlands conservation. TxN will assist with reaching new audiences through increased storytelling and outreach, as well as connections with business owners who own and operate along the Texas Coast.

PARTNERS

NEEDS
- **Increased landowner participation:** Ducks Unlimited seeks additional private and corporate landowners within their target counties to participate in wetland restoration projects.
- **Corporate participation from coastal landowning businesses:** Corporate land holdings along the coast may provide additional acres vital to the creation of healthy and diverse wetland habitat.
- **Increased awareness:** Public awareness of wetlands and their importance instills in the community the need to protect these vital habitats.
- **Additional funding:** With more funding, DU can expand available resources to complete restoration of more acres, more quickly.

For more information visit texanbynature.org or contact us at programs@texanbynature.org or 512-284-7482.