



DEVELOPING FUTURE RETURNS | FEBRUARY 10, 2021 WEBINAR Q&A SUMMARY

In honor of Texan by Nature's 10-year anniversary in 2021, our Virtual Conservation Series held on November 10, 2020, December 10, 2020, February 10, 2021, and March 10, 2021 focuses on the future of conservation. For each webinar, past Conservation Wranglers share their projects, lessons learned, and progress as a starting point for discussion. [Learn more about the Virtual Series.](#)

Home to seven of the 15 fastest growing cities in the U.S., Texas' population has increased over 48% in the last decade alone. With this mass urbanization, less than 1% of Texans are landowners and there's a diminished connection to nature and our natural resources. As Texas develops, it's critical that conservation and business work together to create innovative spaces, practices, and leaders to care for our natural resources, prosperity, and health for generations to come.

- [Cool Schools](#) – Texas Trees Foundation
- [Texas Playa Conservation Initiative](#) – Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- [Sabine Lake Oyster Reef Restoration](#) – Coastal Conservation Association

The presentations were followed by Q&A, all of the questions and answers can be viewed below:

Q: What role do you see businesses playing in the future of conservation, and how can businesses help to increase your organization's impact?

A: Texas Trees Foundation: Businesses play a huge role in the future of conservation as they have a greater reach as well as consumption, and they are the ones that can make changes at a higher level that truly impact the community. Additionally, businesses are the source of our funding as well as volunteer base. Without businesses, we would not be able to continue our work.

A: Texas Playa Conservation Initiative: We see businesses and urban residents playing a healthy role as this program grows. Ideally, we want to create a program that organically attracts partners – we want everyone to 'win'. Allies of the program will be crucial as we try to expand our footprint on the landscape. Whether that be by financial support, recognition of



conservation efforts, or advertising to the customer base or neighbors, it will really vary case by case. But, we're very excited about the prospect of successful partnerships with more businesses and allies in the future.

A: *Sabine Lake Oyster Reef Restoration:* Businesses biggest role is number one, to be a good/responsible neighbor to the resources. Restoration efforts are expensive to execute. Many projects would not be possible without the financial support of local businesses and industry.

Q: **How could this project be replicated by others in the future?**

A: *Texas Trees Foundation:* We are working on this currently as we make our process more efficient and "standardized" so to speak. Our goal is to have a seamless process that can be duplicated in other districts or cities in the next few years. I am also open to brainstorming and sharing resources with others that are interested in expanding the program in areas that we don't currently serve.

A: *Texas Playa Conservation Initiative:* A program that operates similarly to TXPCI exists already in [New Mexico](#). We hope to encourage other states to take ownership of their playas and model landowner-centered programs like TXPCI, modified to best fit the needs of their citizens. New programs would be best served by securing funding by federal grants, like the small [NAWCA \(North American Wetlands Conservation Act\) grant program](#), to get started.

A: *Sabine Lake Oyster Reef Restoration:* One objective of this project was to obtain data regarding the mounding technique for reef deployment. Historically, oyster reef restoration has utilized techniques which lay down materials in a relatively flat-structured manner, resembling a gravel parking lot. This deployment method is advantageous for commercial harvest but is likely not the best method for overall reef production, economic impact, and ecological services. This project may serve as a model for future restoration projects, providing more vertical relief, reduced impacts from sedimentation, and greater reef complexity for various aquatic species which utilize the habitat for refuge. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and research institutions are evaluating this and other projects to establish best practices for future projects.

Q: **What is the one lesson that you've learned from the project you presented about today that attendees can take back and think about applying within their own space?**

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A: *Texas Trees Foundation:* One lesson I learned is that the public is large, eady, and open to change, but sometimes they just need a push to get them there. COVID/Pandemic times showed us that there is a huge interest in outdoor learning and doing school “differently”. We need to build off this momentum to continue our reach moving forward.

A: *Texas Playa Conservation Initiative:* Something we’ve learned in the process of starting and growing TXPCI is leaving the idea of ‘competing for shared resources’ behind. It takes everyone to conserve a shared resource and there’s no reason why everyone can’t also benefit from the resource.

A: *Sabine Lake Oyster Reef Restoration:* Restoration efforts are expensive, requiring support and funds from multiple sources. Mobilization and deployment costs for projects of this nature are highly variable. We have learned that you cannot rely upon historical costs in the development of a budget for a new project. Each project must be independently quoted, based upon real-time availability of supplies and vendors.

Q: What is one thing you learned about collaboration through your work?

A: *Texas Trees Foundation:* Collaboration is challenging but yields the greatest results and creativity. With the abundance of ideas as well as shared knowledge and expertise, a greater impact can be achieved. However, the difficulty lies when there is no one leader coordinating the project. Collaboration must have shared goals and processes to be successful.

A: *Texas Playa Conservation Initiative:* It’s been a valuable learning experience for our staff, finding the best and most efficient means of communicating, both, inside our agency and outside our agency. We’ve found that ‘listening’ plays a huge role – if landowner needs make participation with TXPCI difficult, we can easily find another program, either through NRCS or another agency, that may still conserve natural resources and fit the needs of the landowner.

A: *Sabine Lake Oyster Reef Restoration:* CCA Texas and Building Conservation Trust (BCT) work collaboratively on all projects we are involved in, providing monetary support and advocacy efforts to successfully implement and complete projects. Throughout this experience, we have learned that communication of project deliverables, including timeline projections, are often outside of your control and that you have to remain flexible with all organizations involved to achieve project objectives within allocated budget.

Q&A - Texas Trees Foundation

Q: How do you measure your project's success ecologically and economically?

A: We measure our project's goals ecologically and economically by looking at the benefits of trees throughout its lifetime. We have data on the ecological impact of trees in a community that then translates to economics through lower energy costs, healthier people, and other mitigating effects. As far as the impact on the students, this is more difficult to quantify, but we are collecting data to see if the schools we work with have seen the program translate into other educational successes, even if just positively correlated.

Q: How can schools get involved with this program, and what is your most effective technique when trying to obtain new school partners?

A: We have found it most effective to work directly with the school district to identify the schools that would benefit from our program. Then we reach out to the school directly, after receiving the "blessing" of the ISD. However, we do receive individual requests to work directly with a particular school either through a donor or a community partner that has a connection with that school. We then help connect that donor to a school or the school with a donor. We are currently working on an application process that will allow an interested party to request to be a Cool School.

Q: What are the corporate benefits to getting involved with this program? Can corporate sponsors volunteer?

A: VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES: Each Cool School planting day is an opportunity for sponsors' employees to volunteer and see the tangible results of their work as well as interact with students and faculty in a meaningful way. As a title sponsor, Energy Transfer will have "first right of refusal" for employees to participate in Cool School planting days throughout the year.

MARKETING: Our marketing of Title Sponsorship could include the following deliverables:

- Press release announcing partnership delivered to all major news outlets.
- Listing in Texas Trees Foundation "Year in Review" as sponsor
- Impact stories written for newsletters to be shared internally and externally.



- Features in Texas Trees Foundation newsletters to volunteers and supporters.
- Company logo listing on Texas Trees Foundation website as sponsor
- Logo on collateral sent home with students and distributed in neighboring communities.
- Social media events and media alerts for Cool School™ planting days.

Q: Is the Texas Trees curriculum tied to the TEKS, and is it readily available for free?

A: Yes, the curriculum is tied to TEKS and some of it is available for free. We do have tree planting lessons, scavenger hunts, etc. on our website and plan to add more educational resources for all. However, our curriculum is tailored to our custom outdoor classroom and learning spaces, thus currently only given to the schools that are in our program.

Q: What types of trees do you typically plant?

A: We plant a variety of different trees that are suitable to the soil for that area. We are an urban forestry nonprofit, so all our trees plantings are planned out by an urban forester ensuring that it is the right tree for the right place. Our goal is to not just increase the tree canopy coverage, but also to increase the tree biodiversity. We usually plant an additional 10-15 species of trees to any Cool School campus. We plant a variety of small, medium, and larger trees. Some examples of trees we plant are Bur Oak, Chinquapin Oak, Desert Willow, Eastern Red Cedar, Eastern Redbud, Live Oak, Mexican Plum, Mexican Sycamore, Mexican White Oak, Red Maple, Shumard Oak, Vitex. We plant mostly native, noninvasive species to the extent possible.

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Q&A - Texas Playa Conservation Initiative

Q: What are some successful outreach methods that you have utilized to enroll landowners in your efforts?

Targeting mailings have been successful, as have short PBS/TPWD videos that highlight our program. However, word-of-mouth through neighbors has, by far, been the most successful and quickest way that TXPCI has grown. It has a snowball effect!

Q: Is there a network of landowners who have participated in your project that new landowners can speak and ask questions with?

Not currently, but we are working on creating something like this. In the meantime, if a potential participant is interested in speaking with a landowner that has participated in TXPCI, we can always make that happen.

Q: How are the impacts of your project measured?

We measure success by playa basin acres. That is, the acreage that comprises the clay pan of playa basin once the pit/ditch has been filled. In dry years, that can be difficult to measure on the ground, but satellite imagery can inform our measurements (e.g., changes in vegetation and soil saturation along the playa border).

Q: Have you done any surveys to monitor the bird population usage of restored playas?

Visually, we can see the impact of restored playas as soon as the first rainfall event. We see substantially increased numbers of Sandhill cranes, Northern pintails, Teal, and other species almost immediately. TPWD does perform annual winter waterfowl population surveys across the panhandle, but we have yet to do any formal survey of restored playas specifically. However, with the recent addition of small UAVs to our program, we hope to rectify this soon!

Q: Can you share details about the success in Clovis? What happened there?

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The city of Clovis partnered with Playa Lakes Joint Venture in 2017 to help implement their [Master Water Assurance Plan](#). The city is a rural, agricultural community that addressed the declining municipal water supply through playa restoration and reduced agricultural irrigation rather than the purchase and transport of water from elsewhere. The mayor, David Lansford, did a great job rallying together community members to become self-sufficient in supplying and protecting their own groundwater. A summary of this groundwater conservation model for municipalities and additional articles here:

- [“Helping Towns Provide a Sustainable Water Future”](#)
- [“Ongoing Outreach Key to Community-wide Playa Conservation”](#)
- [“How Pittman-Robertson Funds Are Being Used for Playa Conservation”](#)

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Q&A - Sabine Lake Oyster Reef Restoration

Q: What types of outreach were most successful for bringing together partners to implement this project?

A: CCA Texas and BCT are in continuous communication with TPWD and other partners reviewing existing and recently completed efforts and visions for future efforts.

Q: How can companies and individuals get involved in BCT/CCA efforts for coastal conservation?

A: Companies can coordinate support of our habitat initiatives by contacting BCT, utilizing [this link](#). CCA welcomes individuals and business owners at any of our local chapter fundraising events, which can be found at <https://ccatexas.org/event-directory/>. We are always looking for new volunteers to get involved on our chapter boards and at the grass-roots level. Each chapter



coordinates coastal conservation efforts such as crab trap clean up, beach debris cleanups, kid-fishing events, and various habitat restoration efforts.

Q: When the project is complete, what kind of data and monitoring will happen to calculate the ongoing benefit of the reef?

A: In this particular project, TPWD will do surveys through-out the year to see how much spat and growth has occurred on the cultch that has been placed. They will also analyze the “mounding” reefing technique utilized in the project, to provide guidance on future restoration efforts.

Q: How do restored oyster reefs deal with residual industrial pollutants that deter people from eating them--like PCBs, for example?

A: Oysters (reefs) are natural water filters, and can bioaccumulate residual industrial pollutants. In some extreme situations, areas with high levels of heavy metals or other hazardous industrial wastes will be closed to oyster harvest. The Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and occasionally, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality work together to identify these areas and close them from public harvest.

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