

Make Your Voice Heard for Texas Parks

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Thanks to a bill recently passed by the Texas Legislature, Texans now have a chance to make their voices heard about funding for state and local parks and historic sites.

On November 5, 2019, Texans will head to the polls for a constitutional amendment election. Proposition 5, or "Prop. 5," is one of 10 measures on the ballot. Prop. 5 will dedicate revenue from the Sporting Goods Sales Tax so those dollars can be used only by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission for public parks and historic sites. Some of these dollars will also be earmarked for competitive local park grants, providing additional dollars for local parks across the state (this could include the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge).

If passed, Prop. 5 will provide millions of dollars for park funding each year, and it won't require any new taxes or fees.

That may sound too good to be true, but some background on the issue explains why.

You may not know it, but every time you purchase a sporting good—such as a bicycle, fishing tackle, or kayak—a portion of the existing tax you pay is called the Sporting Goods Sales Tax. The Texas Legislature passed a bill in 1993 to create this new designation because it realized revenue from the cigarette tax, which had previously been the mechanism for funding our state parks, was declining. The state needed a way to keep up with growing demand for our parks that was sustainable and linked to the consumers who are active users of outdoor recreation resources.



Sales Tax actually appropriated each year has varied wildly. This inconsistency has made long-term planning near impossible. Many sites face serious structural challenges from deteriorating



infrastructure, harsh environmental conditions, and extreme weather events. Hurricane Harvey alone caused \$50 million in damage to Texas state parks.

All the while, visitation has continued to increase. Texas state parks have approached 10 million annual visitations in recent years. Growing demand, coupled with Texas' growing population, has put an even greater strain on a fragile system.

Fortunately, the 86th Texas Legislature had two stalwart champions—State Senator Lois Kolkhorst and State Representative John Cyrier—who wanted to ensure that our parks and historical sites will have consistent, reliable funding for generations to come. A bill to put a constitutional dedication of the Sporting Goods Sales Tax on the ballot this fall passed with near-unanimous support, demonstrating the widespread recognition that it was long past time to address this issue. Governor Abbott signed the bill into law over the summer.

Now it's our turn. On November 5, Texans will have the opportunity to vote on Proposition 5 to protect Texas' natural areas, water quality, and history.

For more information on this issue, visit SupportTexasParks.org.