

Boscaje de la Palma Conservation Area Executive Summary

Introduction

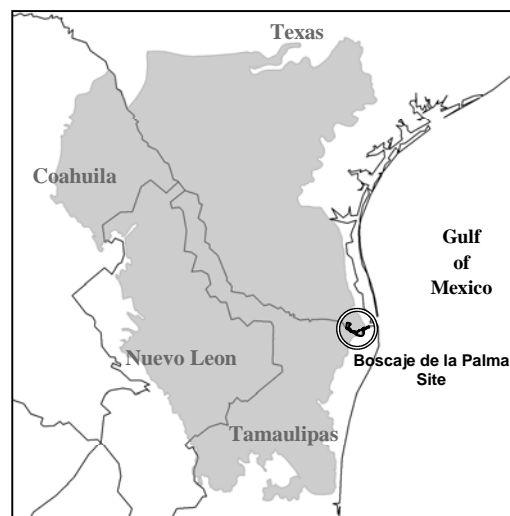
The Boscaje de la Palma conservation area is located in northern Tamaulipas, Mexico and the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, United States (Figures 1 and 2). This area is part of the Tamaulipan Thornscrub ecoregion, so named for the dense, productive thorn brushlands that characterize it. Situated in the interface between the tropics and subtropics, Boscaje de la Palma is an area of high biodiversity and great biogeographical interest. The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo flows through the site, breaking up the thornscrub habitat and allowing proliferation of plant and animal species less common in other parts of the ecoregion. The area is home to approximately 700 vertebrate species, including nearly 90 species which are considered rare, threatened, or endangered. Over fifteen globally rare plant species are found here, and numerous tropical plants are at or near the northernmost limits of their range here, including Rio Grande butterfly bush, hammock lantana, and southmost vervain.

Ecoregion

Integral to all life here is the persistence of flow and water quality in the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. This river supports not only local human communities, but terrestrial and aquatic life as well. After the river, one of the most notable biological features here are the sabal palm forests, which occur within a matrix of Tamaulipan thornscrub vegetation. The banks of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo were once lined with stands of native sabal palms, from the delta in the Gulf of Mexico inland approximately 130 km. These palms are still common much farther south in Mexico, but they are rare along the border. Sabal palms were probably also once common along several river systems of Texas' Gulf Coast, as far north and east as Lavaca Bay, where one small remnant stand still exists on Garcitas Creek Today, only a few hundred disconnected acres of this habitat remain in the United States. The protection and restoration of sabal palm communities is one of the primary conservation objectives here.

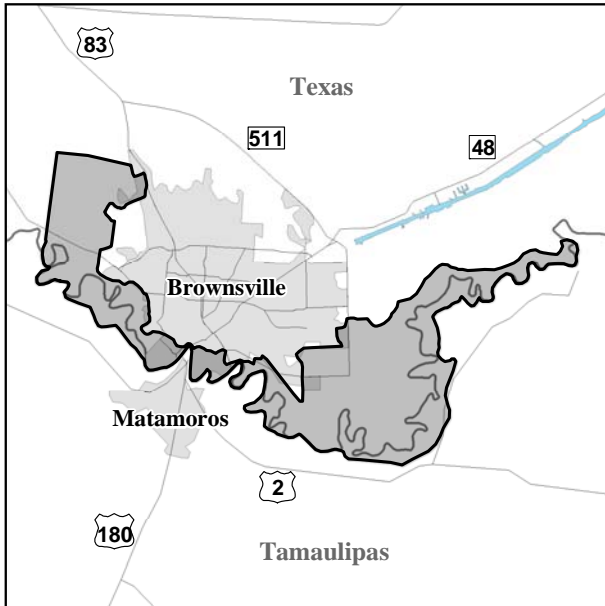
Boscaje de la Palma is important not only for the thornscrub-sabal palm matrix but also as a link in the habitat network needed for wide ranging species such as migratory birds, ocelots, and jaguarundi. The site boundaries encompass several managed areas already under some form of protection, such as the Audubon Society's Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary and tracts in the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. A distinctive feature associated with the Rio Grande Rio Bravo, resacas (oxbow lakes) were created historically by seasonal flood events, as the river moved large sediment loads

Figure 1. Tamaulipan Thornscrub



across the floodplain, creating new channels and blocking off others. These resacas harbor rare amphibians like the lesser Rio Grande lesser siren, and leopard frog, as well as providing food and shelter for migratory songbirds and small mammals. Because of dam construction along the river, most resacas in the area are over 50 years old; and no new resacas are being formed.

Figure 2. Boscaje de la Palma Conservation Area



Challenges and Opportunities

Among the most salient challenges to conserving the resources of this special place are improving water quality and enhancing flows in the river, protecting and restoring native sabal palm communities, retaining migration and travel corridors for wildlife, and combating invasive plants that pose a danger to native species. To abate major threats to this distinctive ecosystem, The Nature Conservancy will partner with public, private and commercial interests to:

- Protect and restore the native Tamaulipan thornscrub-sabal palm community
- Protect terrestrial habitats along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo,
- Retain existing resacas near the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, and
- Improve the condition and viability of aquatic plant and animal populations in this segment of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo.