



Dolan Falls Preserve © Ian Shive.

## THE CHALLENGE: WATER IS NOT AN OPTION

Clean, fresh water is essential to the well-being of nearly every living thing on the planet. Without it, businesses can't function, families can't cook a safe meal, economies can't grow and nature can't flourish. The quality and quantity of this precious resource will in large measure determine who, in future generations, will thrive—and literally, who will survive.

Texas is the second most populous state in the U.S. **with a population of over 25 million people.** That number is projected to jump to more than 46 million people by 2060, and the majority of those will be living in urban areas. In that same timeframe, our water supplies are projected to dwindle by roughly 10 percent, though demand will jump more than 20 percent. As a result, The Conservancy is focused on smart planning that recognizes the water/energy/food nexus and securing funding for the state's water plan. The state estimates that by 2060, water shortages will cost businesses and workers nearly \$116 billion per year.

These statistics are sobering, especially in the wake of the drought of 2011, which was the worst single-year drought on record. **The Lone Star State suffered \$5.2 billion in agricultural losses alone.** While it was by no means the primary cause of our water scarcity problem, the severity

of the drought offered a new platform for action: we are facing the prospect of a precarious water supply at a time of rapid population growth with a current usage model that is unsustainable. Texas must have sound strategies in place to encourage responsible water stewardship and conservation.

## PUBLIC INVESTMENTS IN WATER QUALITY

One of the best ways to protect freshwater resources on a whole-system scale is to protect the land that is crisscrossed by miles and miles of rivers, lakes and streams. Not only is this smart science, but it is an important way to **connect water quality programs to urban and suburban areas**, where nearly 40 percent of Texas' water is expected to be used by 2060.

For years, the people of Austin, San Antonio and surrounding counties have supported successful bond elections to purchase open space and conservation easements over the Edwards Aquifer; this strategy—which serves as a best practice for Central Texas—has resulted in more than **\$700 million in water protection funds** and the conservation of more than 100,000 acres of critical groundwater lands in San Antonio. Through these citizen-approved public investments, **the city has protected 21 percent of the land within Edwards Aquifer recharge zone.**



Independence Creek Preserve © Erika Nortemann.

## PROPELLED BY SCIENCE AND COLLABORATION

As a landowner in Texas, we understand how to be good stewards of the land—**our extensive preserve system serves as a field lab for developing best management practices** for both water and land protection and we work with landowners near each of our preserves to conserve at a scale that ensures results. Land restoration, stewardship and protection are tested on the ground with input and feedback from local communities, businesses and government agencies. **The land and water management issues we confront on each of our preserves represent some of the greatest challenges facing our state: water quality and quantity, biodiversity, land fragmentation and drought.**

Conservancy scientists provide practical, innovative solutions and our field staff engage in on-the-ground science and conservation work. The results are tangible: **our work benefits nearly a dozen different waterways around the state** including the Devils, Blanco, Brazos, Frio, Nueces, Sabinal and Pedernales rivers, Barton, Independence and Love creeks, and Caddo Lake. **Over the past 30 years, the Conservancy has established projects on nearly every major river in Texas**, and has protected more than 200 miles of stream and river habitat as well as five of Texas' most important springs. **We've also helped protect and safeguard nearly 250,000 acres of Texas' coastline**, where a staggering diversity of life is supported by the freshwater that flows into the Gulf's bays and estuaries. Our success depends on a strategic mix of sound science and high-level policy work; we are able to leverage our relationships with community leaders and elected officials at the federal, state and local levels to help inform and implement good conservation policies.

Ensuring a healthy environment and reliable water supplies isn't just about saving nature for nature's sake. It is ultimately about safeguarding a powerful natural resource - and a future for our children. The Conservancy is determined to expand freshwater conservation throughout the state because **conserving water for tomorrow is the greatest legacy we can leave for future generations.**

## Did You Know?

Since our founding in 1951, The Nature Conservancy has protected more than 5,000 miles of rivers, lakes and streams, and over 119 million acres of land worldwide

When it comes to protecting natural resources, teamwork is essential; 95 percent of land in Texas is privately owned, so The Nature Conservancy works side-by-side with landowners, families, local governments and businesses to ensure the protection of land and water in vital watersheds and surrounding aquifers. We've protected 838,000 acres of land across the Lone Star State, including more than 200 miles of stream and river habitat within five of Texas' most critical springs.



Above: Independence Creek Preserve. © Erika Nortemann. Below: Kemp's Ridley sea turtle © Lynn McBride.