



# TXSER News Brief

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## Texas EcoSummits: The Tribe Has Spoken

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Teaming With Wildlife: True To Texas (TWW: TTT), a coalition of businesses and organizations concerned with wildlife conservation, held a series of EcoSummits across the State of Texas in Weslaco, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Houston. The goal of the EcoSummits was to bring together individuals and organizations from both public and private sectors to discuss wildlife conservation priorities for their ecoregions, in order to build support for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (TPWD) Texas Conservation Action Plan (TCAP). TXSER Members participated in all four of these gatherings with Board Members in attendance in both San Antonio and Fort Worth.

The following are a few observations from the Fort Worth EcoSummit. Rob Denkhaus, Natural Resource Manager for the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge and Director of TWW: TTT opened the EcoSummit, with a discussion of TWW: TTT's role in developing a "unified voice for wildlife conservation." He was inspired by Seth Godin's TED Talk "The Tribes We Lead" which emphasizes the shared ideas and values that allow ordinary people the power to lead and foster change. Denkhaus challenged us to take the messages from the day and return to the multiple and varied tribes to which we belong and spread the word about wildlife conservation priorities in Texas.

Denkhaus was followed by John Davis, Director of TPWD's Wildlife Diversity Program. Davis delved into TCAP and TPWD financing. One might have heard a pin drop in the room when Davis explained that 97% of TPWD's Wildlife Diversity Program was funded through hunter-sourced funding streams, yet hunters make up only 3.8% of the users of conservation land - - a huge disconnect between those who use and enjoy the out-of-doors and those who pay for its protection. Davis challenged all of us to "put our thinking caps on" and take these concerns back to our respective "tribes" to help come up with new and creative means for funding wildlife conservation.

The last speaker of the morning, Jack Tidwell, Urban Planner formerly with the North Central Texas Council of Governments and now an independent consultant, brought the discussion directly to the heart of the DFW area saying we must identify the "balance between what is urban and what is natural." Tidwell contends that we need to acknowledge the rapidly growing population of this area as well as the changing demographics. He

argued that we must think about the “customers of tomorrow” - - what are their needs and what are their expectations -- and we need to develop “shared meaning across environmental divides.”

And, that was just the morning. During the afternoon participants broke into 8 different working groups to discuss issues from the education of government officials, population growth and demographics to habitat loss, invasive species and smart growth. Assuming that each of the other EcoSummits were equally productive, TWW: TTT and TPWD have a lot of material to synthesize to move us forward as a unified voice for Texas wildlife conservation.

**The Texas Society for Ecological Restoration, connects scientists, practitioners, and policy-makers to restore Texas ecosystems and the vital services they provide.**

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