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Texas Healthy Habitats Grants Awarded to 15 Texas Schools, Nonprofits

Student Projects Will Help Implement Texas Wildlife Action Plan

AUSTIN, Texas – A total of \$225,000 in Texas Healthy Habitats Grants has been awarded to 15 different schools and non-profit youth organizations across the state, including schools in or near Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, Houston, Bryan, Lubbock and other cities. Each organization will receive up to \$15,000 to support students doing service-learning projects to benefit wildlife and the environment.

The grants are being administered by the [Texas Center for Service-Learning](#), made possible with a donation from EnCana Oil & Gas (USA) Inc. to the [Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation](#). Texas Parks and Wildlife Department scientists met with student-teacher teams on Aug. 14 in Austin, and TPWD experts will continue to guide grant projects as they unfold over the next year.

The students will address priorities in the Texas Wildlife Action Plan, a blueprint to “keep common species common” and avoid more species from becoming threatened and endangered. Texas is believed to be the first state where student service projects will support a state wildlife action plan.

Students will research and define a local environmental issue, investigate public and organizational policies related to the issue, design and implement a service-learning project in collaboration with at least two community partners (including TPWD staff), evaluate and publicize the results to public officials and community members, and develop Web profiles for each project that will be integrated into the TPWD and TxCSL Web sites. Students will likely plan projects this fall and do field work in spring.

Earlier this year, EnCana donated \$486,000 to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation. The donations supports the Healthy Habitats grants program, plus two other projects—control of giant salvinia and other invasive plants choking Toledo Bend reservoir in East Texas, and facilities for the new Texas Game Warden Training Center in Hamilton

County.

Since 1991, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has been the official non-profit partner of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. By bringing together companies, corporations, communities and individuals, the foundation has raised more than \$60 million benefiting a wide variety of projects.

EnCana is one of North America's largest independent natural gas producers. The company has a long history of supporting conservation and education causes. For the past two years EnCana has been on both the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index and the North American Index. Inclusion in these groups demonstrates high environmental, social, and business standards.

The Texas Center for Service-Learning seeks to improve student achievement through service-learning, the thoughtful integration of community service with academic learning. The center assists students, teachers, administrators, and communities in Texas with training, technical assistance, and resources to develop and strengthen service-learning.

Below are descriptions of grant recipients and their proposed projects, listed by metropolitan area or region.

AUSTIN AREA

Camp Fire USA Balcones Council - Coordinator Contact: Lavert Rodgers, (361) 442-5291, lrodger@campfireusabalcones.org - Camp Fire USA Balcones Council, The Griffin School, and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center are partnering in a project to eradicate or control invasive species and restore natural habitat along Waller Creek, which flows through urban Austin into the Colorado River.

DALLAS AREA

Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Dallas Independent School District - Teacher/Coordinator: Holly Gentry, (972) 502-7100, hgentry@dallasisd.org – At least 200 school students will help create a school habitat garden using plants native to the area to help restore Blackland Prairie. The garden will conserve water by collecting rain and using it to water the plants, which should also result in less water runoff flooding streets and less pollution ending up in creeks and rivers. Project partners include the Texas AgriLife extension office in Dallas and TPWD Urban Wildlife Biologist Brett Johnson.

Dallas Environmental Science Academy, Dallas Independent School District - Teacher/Coordinator: Brenda Thomas, (972) 794-3950, brthomas@dallasisd.org – This is a Community Sustainability Campaign to educate school students and citizens about air and water quality and pollution, energy alternatives to preserve the natural environment, habitat destruction, overpopulation of certain wildlife species, invasive species and concerns about the native Blackland Prairie.

FORT WORTH AREA

Aledo Middle School – Teacher/Coordinator: Terry Snow, (817) 441-5198, tsnow@aledo.k12.tx.us – About 20 9th and 8th grade students will conduct native grassland prairie restoration and related conservation education to improve water retention and water quality at Bear Creek Ranch, a 2200-acre private ranch near the school. Project partners include Dixon Water Foundation, Native Prairies Association of Texas, and Fort Worth Nature Center.

Fort Worth Country Day School - Teacher/Coordinator: Perri Carr, (817) 239-3421, pcarr@fwcds.org – This private school project will conserve and restore a 3-to-5 acre piece of school property which is a hillside fragment of increasingly rare native Blackland Prairie. The site will soon experience habitat loss due from new highway construction and related development. Students will also demonstrate the benefits of building a green roof using native plants on a small shed.

HOUSTON AREA

Extraordinary Education Family Learning Center, Magnolia, TX - Project Coordinator: Jackie Pace, 832-640-8141, Jackie@Ashley-Pace.com – This nonprofit organization supporting approximately 75 home schooling families will create a natural habitat refuge for native and endangered plants and animals. Students will also conduct outreach and education, create water conservation strategies, reduce negative impacts of non-native and invasive species, and involve other groups to increase support for conservation on private lands and promote public-private conservation partnerships.

AUSTIN AREA

Ambleside School of Fredericksburg – Teacher/Coordinator: Tony Watson, (830) 990-9059, tony@amblesidefredericksburg.com - The future site of the private Ambleside School of Fredericksburg is a 55-acre tract just outside the city on the Pedernales River. Students will transplant trees, forbs, and grasses in the upland pastures; build structures and/or install plants that provide favorable habitat for birds, mammals, butterflies, and hummingbirds; and transplant grasses in the riparian zone along the river to help reduce runoff and improve water filtration in this ecologically sensitive area.

BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION AREA

Hearne Junior High School – Teacher/Coordinator: Robert Wilson, (979) 574-3607, rwilson@hearne.k12.tx.us – Students will conduct water quality testing around Robertson County, and water conservation educational programs for elementary students and the at-large community, fulfilling a Texas Wildlife Action Plan call to build stakeholder

relationships for water conservation. Partners include Texas A&M University, Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service, and Brazos Valley Groundwater Conservation District.

PANHANDLE

Friona Independent School District, Parmer County - Teacher/Coordinator: Patsy Allen, (806) 265-5189, pallen@frionaisd.com – The project will conduct education and create awareness of the critical roles Playa Lakes play in providing water for wildlife, agriculture, industries, and communities. The shallow-water playas are vital for people and wildlife, but are not well known or understood by people in the region. Partners include Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Ogallala Commons, and Texas Tech University.

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On the Web:

<http://txcsl.org/>

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/>

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/news_images/?g=encana_donation_projects

<http://www.tpwf.org>