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August 24, 2020

Texas Sunset Advisory Commission
ATTN: Ms. Danielle Nasr, Project Manager
Robert E. Johnson Bldg., 6th Floor
1501 North Congress Ave. Austin, Tx. 78701
Sent also by email: danielle.nasr@sunset.texas.gov and sunset@sunset.texas.gov

Re: Comment and Request for Recommendation for Texas Parks and Wildlife Depart Sunset Review

Dear Ms. Nasr and Commissioners

I am writing as president of the Northeast Texas Trail (NETT) Coalition, regarding the Staff Report on the continuation of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Our Coalition is a non-profit organization dedicated to the full development of the NETT, a partially completed rails to trail path in Northeast Texas.

We are supportive of the recommendation for enhanced strategic planning in order to accommodate the increasing needs placed on TPWD by the population growth of Texas. As your staff summary pointed out, "as Texas' population has swelled and the state has experienced unprecedented growth, the need to conserve land and water resources and provide access to outdoor recreational opportunities is both higher in demand and harder to secure."

With land acquisition and costs rising, an option to consider by TPWD and the Texas Legislature is the use of old railroad right of ways that have been railbanked for possible future active transportation needs. Many of these have been converted into trails and linear parks across the country and are beginning to appear in Texas. There is no cost to the state for the trail land, an enormous savings. Because of the long distances of these trails (the NETT is 130 miles long), large numbers of hikers and bikers can be accommodated. Existing trails such as the completed portions of the NETT have seen large increases in use during the pandemic days and are accessible to a large urban population. And, if other trails in the United States such as the Katy Trail in Missouri are a predictor, tourism and dollars flow to areas with long developed trails. [Economic Impact of Missouri Katy Trail](#)

As with any recommendation from the Sunset Commission, cost/benefit is crucial but as the staff summary notes, "by acquiring and managing parks and other public lands, TPWD also ensures the growing population of Texans and tourists have access to the state's diverse lands and unique natural features for recreation." We need to be creative and resourceful to meet the park needs of the future at a reasonable cost and a **strategic plan for TPWD with provisions for development of trails as new linear state parks** such as the NETT is a solid choice.

Sincerely,

Earl Erickson, President

Northeast Texas Trail Coalition