

SUBJECT: Expanding uses of the Texas Parks and Wildlife capital account

COMMITTEE: State Recreational Resources — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Cook, Alexander, J. Davis, Ellis, Homer, Hope, Ritter
0 nays
2 absent — Kuempel, Crownover

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 18 — 31-0

WITNESSES: For — Douglas Evans, Texas Recreation and Parks Society and City of Grapevine; David Langford, Texas Wildlife Association
Against — None
On — Andrew Sansom, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

BACKGROUND: In 1993, the 73rd Legislature repealed the dedication of cigarette taxes to the general revenue account of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and replaced that revenue source with a portion of taxes collected on the sale, use, or storage of sporting goods. HB 706 established the Texas Parks and Wildlife Capital Account in general revenue and allowed the Parks and Wildlife Commission to fund projects that directly provide hunting, fishing, or outdoor recreation opportunities to the public.
TPWD revenue from the sporting-goods sales tax is capped at \$32 million per year, of which \$31 million goes to state and local parks and the remaining \$1 million is dedicated to the capital account. Funds in this account may be used for projects to acquire or develop land or facilities, for debt service, and for local park grants.

DIGEST: CSSB 287 would expand the authorized uses of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Capital Account to include maintenance and operation of parks, fisheries, and wildlife projects approved by the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Approved projects could include:

- ! initiating or participating in partnerships to enhance conservation of historical, cultural, or natural resources;
- ! operational or maintenance costs associated with parks, fisheries, wildlife projects, or TPWD law enforcement; and
- ! meeting requirements for providing matching money for federal grants for parks, fisheries, or wildlife projects.

CSSB 287 also would change the name of the account to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Conservation and Capital Account.

This bill would take effect September 1, 1999.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSSB 287 would broaden the range of projects that the Parks and Wildlife Commission could approve and fund through the capital account. The Legislature created this account to identify and fund the needs of all the diverse groups who use state resources. Expanding the fund's allowable uses would make it possible to serve diverse interests better.

Funds placed in the renamed Texas Parks and Wildlife Conservation and Capital Account would have support from all constituencies of TPWD, including state and local parks, fish and wildlife, conservation, and law enforcement interests, because any or all of these groups would stand to benefit from project funding. The account now receives about \$1 million per year from the sporting-goods sales tax and would be able to allocate any future funding increase in a diverse manner.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSSB 287 would expand the uses of the Capital Account fund but would provide no additional money. It would diversify allowable uses in the hope of future additional funding that might never occur.

The bill would expand the use of the Capital Account funds to include maintenance and operational expenses, which already are funded in other budget areas, such as operational expenses of state parks.

NOTES:

The committee substitute renamed the capital account and added to the list of the account's allowable uses project maintenance, initiation or participation in

partnerships to enhance conservation, and costs associated with TPWD law enforcement.

HB 1906 by West, which would allocate special license-plate fees to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Capital Account, was reported favorably by the House Transportation Committee on April 15 and recommended for the Local, Consent, and Resolutions Calendar.