

TEXAS COMMERCE BANK - DALLAS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

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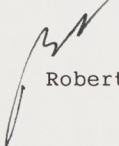
Mr. Stuart Gentling
902 Boland
Fort Worth, TX

Dear Stuart:

As a native Texan and an artist who appreciates Texas Wildlife, I thought you might enjoy a recent Op Ed piece I did for the morning paper on The Texas Nature Conservancy.

Look forward to seeing you again soon.

Best regards,



Robert L. Thornton, III



Conservation in Texas - An Imperative

by: R.L. Thornton, III

As a native Texan, I understand as well as most that special feeling that Texans have for their state, and for the land itself. We tend to find, for example, the South Texas brush country actually beautiful, just because it has character, and some of us prefer the Hill Country to the Alps, native prairies to Palm Beach. We've even have cowboys that sing songs about these kinds of things.

And yet for too long, our appreciation of the land has been derivative in part of what what we have been able to take from it - how well it harvests and what we can build on it, as opposed to what makes it special and what species it will support. Timber, oil, cotton, condominiums - the land has yielded product and progress for a long, long time.

But time is running out, and now more suddenly than seems possible, we run the risk of losing that very diversity and uniqueness that have made the landscape special. Where there was once 12 million acres of virgin blackland prairie, there is but 5 thousand left untouched today. Where there was once an isolated mountain range with bighorn sheep and aspen, now mobile homes stalk the summit. Today, there is a Sabine River bottom land that supports wood ducks and 200 hundred year old trees. Today there is also a politician's blueprint for a recreation lake that will tomorrow quietly replace it. Over the last 50 years, we've lost tidal flats and wet lands, animals and plants; and as habitat gives way to urbanization, species drift into extinction. It's that simple.

However, with Texas fighting hard to rebuild its economy and create additional jobs, many think that conservation initiatives are not quite that important, certainly not that urgent. But that's short sighted, and that's dead wrong. Economic cycles swing up and down, but habitat preservation in Texas is at a critical stage, and the fight to save it will be won or lost over the next few years. Whether we like it or not, the time is now, and we are the ones that will have to make a difference.

And there is some hope here, because there is something new and promising stirring in Texas today - a growing awareness on the part of many, not just the traditional few, from bird watchers, to hunters, to businessmen, that time is indeed short, and that we all need to get on with the job of preserving what's left that's special. There is also a growing understanding that conservation and economic development need not be mutually exclusive, and that you can still "keep the dirt flying," without draining the last swamp.

A leader in carving out this middle ground to preserve important habitat, yet with a businessman's touch, is the Texas Nature Conservancy. It's approach to conservation has a different spin: it doesn't picket, boycott, or stake out any advocacy position. It simply preserves land the old fashion way - it identifies what's ecologically important, it buys it when it becomes available, and then it takes care of it. Even when special land is not available for sale, the Conservancy works with landowners to nurture ownership pride and to build good stewardship.

Although the Conservancy has been critized by other conservation groups for its low-key, business-like approach, it nevertheless gets the job done. Over the last few years, it has been able to preserve over 200 thousand acres of ecologically important land in 32 counties in Texas, over 100 thousand of which are wet lands up and down the Texas coast so critical to migratory waterfowl. In similar programs nationwide, the Conservancy has saved 3 million acres, more land each year over the last eight years than the federal government itself. All with private money. In so doing, The Nature Conservancy has become the largest private sanctuary in the world. Supporters consequently have said that the Conservancy is "all action, no talk" and contend that a critical public-interest principle has been substantiated - that if the job is important, you can get it done in the private sector.

And so to the private sector the Conservancy goes: to individuals, foundations, and corporations, to continue to reach out for support to educate and motivate Texans to preserve the best of the rest of their state. And what better legacy than to conserve an important piece of the original Texas, so that our great grandchildren can walk a meadow in Hunt County, that will have remained unchanged from the time of the buffalo and Comanche, or can hear the trumpeting of a whooping crane, that would have been extinct but for the preserved Matagorda marshes. And we as citizens can take real pride, that despite all that will have inevitably changed by then, we will have bequeathed some special, original land, with its special, original species still on it, just the way it was when our own great grandfathers settled Texas, and the land was called a Republic.

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