



Texas recognized for diversity and inclusion efforts

TPWD Community Outdoor Outreach Program named 2020 Diversity and Inclusion Award Winner

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. - Oct. 28, 2020 – The Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) named the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP) the 2020 Diversity and Inclusion Award winner during their 74th annual meeting, held virtually Oct. 26-28. The program's intent is to engage under-represented audiences in outdoor recreation and nature.

“This program is an essential component to TPWD's goal of diversifying the audiences visiting Texas State Parks and utilizing agency programs as well as increasing Texas residents' connection to natural and cultural resources,” SEAFWA President Paul Johansen said. "Broadening the direct connections of people from all backgrounds, cultures, and areas helps us better manage natural resources for everyone, and that is the fundamental duty of state wildlife agencies."

The program awards grants between \$5,000 and \$50,000 to recipients scored in a highly competitive process. All projects must target one or more of the agency's target demographics, which include female, low income, ethnic minority, and individuals with physical or mental disabilities. More than 34,000 unique participants are expected to be served from the 2019 grant awards.

Examples of projects awarded in 2019 include:

- A youth development program engaging 300 minority youth in 200 hours of nature-based adventures each year. Activities include mentor-led Saturday challenges and wilderness trips, such as a weeklong back-country camping experience at Colorado Bend State Park.
- An all-female youth program focused on environmental science and career development in conservation as well as overnight campouts to McKinney Falls and Pedernales State Parks.

- Three water-based programs in Galveston which include adaptive sailing training for disabled athletes, a youth sailing team and educational field trips aboard a Bay vessel for mostly low income, minority students.

"Though the grant timelines are limited, many of these projects continue to work with the same participants for years to come, creating a deeper, longer-lasting relationship between participants, their natural resources and the TPWD," said TPWD Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer David Buggs.

The winner of the Diversity and Inclusion Award is chosen by a small group of volunteers with the SEAFWA Minorities in Natural Resources Committee (MINRC) and judged on their commitment to diversity and inclusion, the effectiveness of their programs, and any partnership developed and used to support their diversity and inclusion goals.

The Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) is an organization whose members are the state agencies with primary responsibility for management and protection of the fish and wildlife resources in 15 states, Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. Member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.