

*The Promise of*  
**POWDERHORN  
RANCH**



An aerial photograph of Powderhorn Ranch, showing a vast expanse of green wetlands and coastal prairie. The landscape is characterized by winding waterways, sandy paths, and patches of dense vegetation. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day. The overall scene is a rich, natural environment.

**F**or decades, conservation groups hoped to conserve Powderhorn Ranch, an expansive, 17,351-acre swath of coastal prairie and wetlands on Matagorda Bay. In 2014, this goal was realized when Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation purchased the property, making history as Texas' largest-ever conservation investment.

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The acquisition also marked the first major success of TPWF's ambitious *Keeping it Wild: The Campaign for Texas*, which has since raised more than \$100 million to conserve the wild things and wild places of Texas for future generations.

But the work to give Powderhorn Ranch to the people of Texas had only just begun; TPWF worked to carefully steward and restore the property's natural resources while making plans for it to someday become a state park and wildlife management area. The project crossed the finish line on October 27, 2021, when TPWF donated the final 1,360 acres of the property to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. This gift marked the completion of a once-in-a-generation conservation effort made possible by an extraordinary coalition of partners and donors determined to keep Powderhorn wild.

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*Today, Powderhorn Ranch belongs to the people of Texas. And it always will.*

Since 1991, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) has engaged philanthropy to advance Texas' proud outdoor traditions and conserve our state's wildlife, habitat and natural resources. Our vision is for all Texans to have access to the wild things and wild places in our state, both now and for generations to come.



## CONSERVING TEXAS' VANISHING COASTAL PRAIRIE

Powderhorn Ranch is undeniably stunning. Encompassing 17,351 acres, visitors are awed by the vast expanse of grassland, dotted with live oak mottes and extending almost endlessly into a mosaic of freshwater wetlands, salt marshes, and seagrass beds. The undisturbed landscape and surrounding waters support a range of species, from shorebirds, songbirds, and raptors to finfish, ungulates, and invertebrates. These habitats and incredible biodiversity once typified the region, but today, Powderhorn Ranch represents one of the largest remaining tracts of Texas' rapidly vanishing coastal prairie.

With the accelerating pace of development and conversion of grassland habitat across much of Texas, conservation groups identified the permanent conservation of Powderhorn Ranch as an urgent priority. In 2014, significant funding became available from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation committed to raise up to \$15 million to complete funding for the project. In addition to the \$37.7 million purchase price, costs also included initial habitat restoration and an endowment to fund long-term maintenance, bringing the total for the project to nearly \$50 million. Through the efforts of numerous partners and donors alongside TPWF, the decades-long goal of conserving Powderhorn Ranch became a reality.

Powderhorn Ranch is a significant conservation success in its own right and is also one component of a long-term strategy to conserve coastal habitat throughout the Matagorda Bay system. At the time of the acquisition, Powderhorn Ranch complemented an existing network of conserved lands along the Texas mid-coast, and TPWF has continued to engage philanthropy to achieve landscape-scale conservation. All told, more than 6,500 additional acres of pristine barrier habitat in the Matagorda Bay system have been conserved since 2016.

Today, Powderhorn Ranch is the beating heart at the center of Matagorda Bay's sprawling coastal ecosystem, pulsing life through a network of interconnected habitat. These conserved lands cover nearly 150,000 acres, from the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to Mad Island Wildlife Management Area and the recently established Matagorda Peninsula Coastal Management Area.



The acquisition of Powderhorn Ranch is a promise kept to the people of Texas. This historic investment was made possible by an exceptional public-private partnership and exemplifies how landscape-scale conservation can be achieved in Texas and beyond. We are immensely grateful to Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission Chairman Emeritus T. Dan Friedkin and the TPWF team, led by Kelly Thompson and Anne Brown, who enabled this incredible conservation success.

**MIKE GREENE**  
*Chairman,  
TPWF Board of Trustees*

## STEWARDING POWDERHORN FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Like much of North America's once-vast expanse of grassland habitat, Powderhorn Ranch and its menagerie of native species were shaped over eons by natural processes, such as lightning-sparked wildfires and roaming herds of ruminants. While Powderhorn escaped the Gulf Coast's development boom, centuries of agriculture, cattle grazing, and fire suppression had altered the landscape, jeopardizing the wild things that call Texas' coastal prairie home.

Restoring Powderhorn's habitats to meet the full life cycle needs of a diverse assemblage of resident and migratory species has been an important priority for TPWF and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). In collaboration with TPWD, TPWF secured funding and led restoration efforts until the property was donated to TPWD. TPWD will continue to carefully steward Powderhorn's natural resources, funded in part by a long-term endowment at TPWF.

When TPWF took ownership of the property, nearly 6,000 acres were dominated by running live oak, an extensive network of live oak roots that continually puts up shoots resistant to shredding or burning. The resulting dense thicket, up to 10 feet high and essentially impenetrable, was choking out grassland-dependent species. To combat the problem, TPWF conducted selective herbicide control and prescriptive fire management, clearing the running live oak and revitalizing Powderhorn's native prairie.

Just as the grasslands benefitted from restoration, TPWF has also worked to steward Powderhorn's wetland habitats by installing three new solar wells. These wells provide permanent water sources for terrestrial wildlife, wading birds, and waterfowl and create the transitional wetlands necessary for a complete coastal ecosystem.

TPWF's careful work to bring the habitats of Powderhorn Ranch into equilibrium and restore long-absent natural processes is paying dividends. Alongside the abundance of resident wildlife thriving under improved management, as many as nine whooping cranes have been sighted at Powderhorn Ranch in a single day. As one of the rarest birds in North America, the presence of whooping cranes is a living testament to the incredible conservation success story of Powderhorn Ranch.



“ Powderhorn Ranch conserves irreplaceable wildlife habitat in an area of Texas that is facing increasing development pressure. The investment in this property forever protects a remarkable diversity of species and habitat and connects a patchwork of protected lands that are vital to the resilience of a healthy Gulf Coast ecosystem. ”

**CARTER SMITH**

*TPWD Executive Director,  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*

||| A PROMISE KEPT TO  
||| THE PEOPLE OF TEXAS

From gentle bay waters to a year-round symphony of birdsong, Powderhorn Ranch invites us to leave behind the towering structures and tiny bright screens of our daily lives. While conservation was the lodestar guiding the acquisition of Powderhorn Ranch, its incredible recreational potential – as well as Texans’ growing demand for public green space – was an important element of the acquisition.

With the acquisition complete, TPWF made plans to donate the property to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for the people of Texas. The majority of the property, approximately 15,000 acres, was donated in 2018 for the creation of a wildlife management area. Before the property was transferred, TPWF worked with numerous partners to facilitate access for recreational opportunities, such as birding, hunting, camping, and fishing, as well as research on topics ranging from coastal prairie restoration practices to bobwhite quail populations and habitat usage. Today, Powderhorn Wildlife Management Area provides scheduled access for conservation education, research, birding, and public hunting. Staff are focused on continuing the habitat management and restoration activities that make the property an attractive destination for human visitors, wintering whooping cranes, and everything in between.

In 2021, TPWF donated the final 1,360 acres of Powderhorn Ranch to TPWD for an eventual state park, fulfilling the promise made to the people of Texas when the acquisition began in 2014. When the new park opens, visitors will thrill to the sights and sounds of myriad bird species, paddle or cast a line into Matagorda Bay, hike across the coastal prairie, and camp under the stars.

In permanently conserving 17,351 acres of pristine Gulf Coast habitat and providing abundant opportunities for outdoor experiences, the acquisition of Powderhorn Ranch is nothing short of a transformational conservation success. From wetlands teeming with life to a sea of grasslands extending endlessly into the unbroken horizon, Powderhorn Ranch and the wealth of resources it contains will forever be held in trust for the people of Texas.



We are deeply grateful for all who supported this cornerstone of *Keeping it Wild: The Campaign for Texas*. This transformational project conserves irreplaceable wildlife habitat and brings an exciting new recreational opportunity to the people of Texas. It demonstrates how Texas’ community of conservationists can work hand-in-hand with the state to preserve an extraordinary piece of our natural heritage for generations to come.



**T. DAN FRIEDKIN**

*Chairman Emeritus,  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission  
Chairman,  
Keeping it Wild: The Campaign for Texas*

2014-2021:  
A CONSERVATION STORY



2014

TPWF's initial focus was securing necessary funding and completing the purchase:

- Securing \$34.5 million from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund, established with settlement dollars from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill
- Raising up to \$15 million to complete funding; the \$50 million total project cost includes acquisition, restoration, and long-term management of the property
- Leading a coalition of partners to acquire the property on August 8, 2014, ensuring the permanent conservation of its 17,351 acres and 11 miles of tidal bayfront
- Launching *Keeping it Wild: The Campaign for Texas* with a lead gift from T. Dan Friedkin for Powderhorn Ranch

2015-2017

TPWF stewarded the property, led habitat restoration efforts, and facilitated access for research and recreation:

- Conducting herbicide treatment on more than 3,000 acres of running live oak and prescribed burns on approximately 5,700 acres, including 2,800 acres of the land treated with herbicide
- Constructing facilities and purchasing equipment to restore and manage natural resources and establish the future wildlife management area
- Installing 13 miles of interior fencing to facilitate rotational grazing and three solar wells to provide water for wildlife
- Working with TPWD to complete baseline surveys of native species and rare plants, including deer and bird species, as well as vegetation surveys to monitor the success of ongoing restoration practices

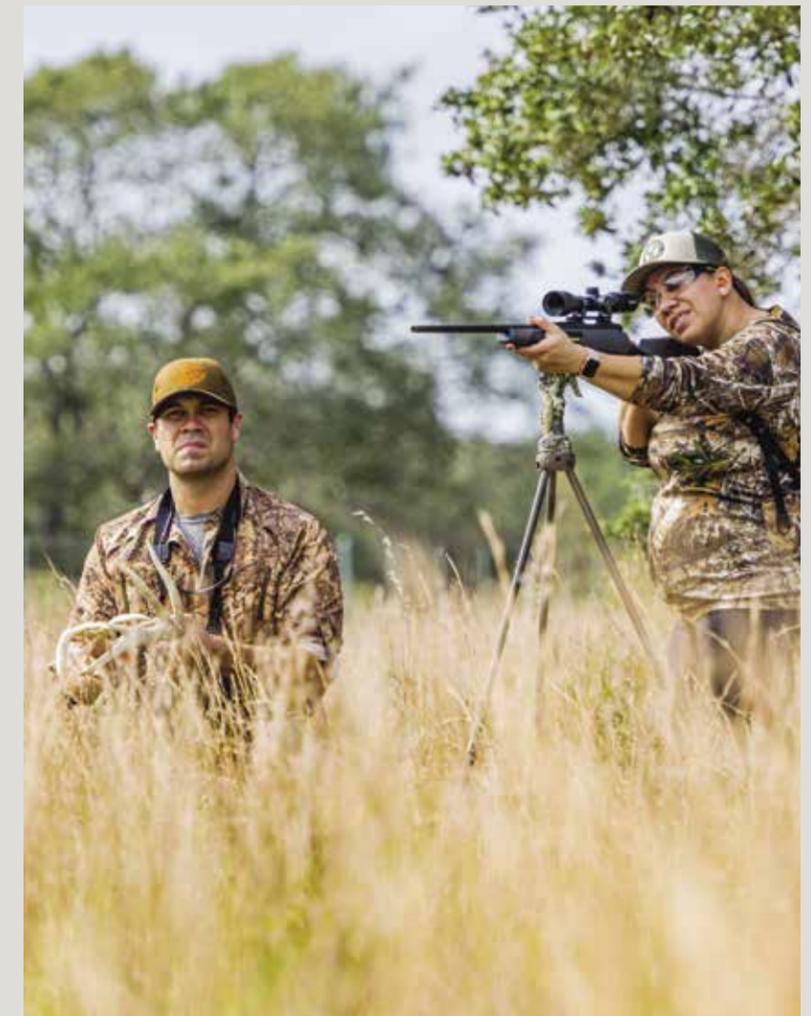


- Placing the entire property under a permanent conservation easement, held by The Nature Conservancy
- Restoring the historic camp house, the only original building on the property, which will eventually become a state park interpretive center
- Providing research opportunities, including studying coastal prairie restoration practices; researching Rio Grande turkey, bobwhite quail, and other native species; examining vegetation structure in treated versus untreated areas; and assessing the impact of non-native sambar deer on emergent wetlands
- Installing a rainwater collection system to replace an aging cistern and serve as a demonstration area for sustainable water management and conservation practices
- Coordinating with the Texas Youth Hunting Program to host 10 hunts serving nearly 60 youth hunters, some of whom harvested their very first deer

2018-2021

TPWF continued to lead restoration and stewardship on the future state park portion of the property while TPWD managed the newly created wildlife management area:

- Donating 14,998 acres to TPWD on October 19, 2018, to establish Powderhorn Wildlife Management Area
- Conducting prescribed burns on 6,000 acres of coastal prairie habitat to reclaim, enhance, and maintain whooping crane wintering grounds
- Developing new adult hunters through the Stewards of the Wild mentored hunting initiative, with hunts held at Powderhorn Ranch
- Donating the final 1,360 acres of Powderhorn Ranch to TPWD on October 27, 2021, for an eventual state park



To our donors, trustees, and staff -  
to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and staff -  
and to numerous partners and conservation champions across Texas and beyond -  
because of you, Powderhorn Ranch will remain forever wild.

