

Nature Tourism in Texas:

An Historical Case-study of a New Tourism Industry

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of nature tourism development in Texas and offers a critical assessment of what has been accomplished and what needs to be done next.

Nature tourism development in Texas has been hindered by a lack of coordination between state agencies and inadequacy of programs to assist communities, private operators, and landowners. The State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism, established in 1993, identified areas of need. However, by not establishing clear goals and measurable objectives identifying responsible parties, progress on statewide efforts has been limited. In addition it appears that state policies have created significant challenges for the tourism industry. Nonetheless, much has been accomplished in the State through individual initiative and cooperation. Communities and landowners have recognized nature tourism's potential and have been pushing state agencies to address their needs.

INTRODUCTION

Both the petroleum and agricultural industries have declined in rural Texas creating an economic crisis for communities and individual landowners. Nature-based tourism seems to have substantial potential as an alternative economic activity. Tourism is currently important in Texas. The Texas Department of Economic Development reported that in 2001 visitors to Texas spent over \$39.8 billion on transportation, lodging, food, entertainment and recreation, and incidentals. Visitor spending in Texas directly supported 468,000 jobs and generated \$2.1 billion in taxes (Texas Economic Development 2003: 5).

The State of Texas began an initiative in 1993 to develop nature tourism for local economic development. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the progress of that initiative. Such an evaluation is necessary and beneficial for understanding governmental policy and actions, and their affects.

This evaluation rests on two “baseline” documents. The first is *Nature Tourism in the Lone Star State: Economic Opportunities in Nature* (STFTNT 1994) which set out goals and strategies for nature tourism development. The second is an article by Var (1997) that provides an overview of the potential for nature tourism development in Texas. This article is a qualitative case study intended to “examine ‘reality’ in all its complexity” (Walle 1997: 534). Although it identifies problems, the intent of this article is to emphasize the lessons learned that can benefit tourism development in Texas and other states.

Dearth of Policy Examination in the Tourism Literature

A review of the tourism literature regarding policy reveals that the topic has traditionally been ignored. Matthews (1975, 195) wrote “the literature on tourism is grossly lacking of political research. Hall later explicitly stated “the same comment still holds true” (1994, 1), going on to state

‘The mainstream of tourism research has either ignored or neglected the political dimension of the allocation of tourism resources, the generation of tourism policy, and the politics of tourism development (p. 2).’

Hall (1989, 1994), Richter (1983), and Matthews and Richter (1991) highlighted several potential contributing factors:

- “there is an unwillingness on the part of many decision makers both in government and in the private sector to acknowledge the political nature of tourism
- there is a lack of official interest in conducting research into the politics of tourism
- tourism is not regarded as a serious scholarly subject
- there are substantial methodological problems in conducting political and administrative studies” (Hall 1994, 4)

However, the lack of research on tourism policy is inconsistent with tourism’s importance as a means of economic and regional development (Mathieson and Wall 1982; Williams and Shaw 1988; Pearce 1989; Hall D. 1991; Hall C. 1994).

The tourist industry is a major economic, environmental and socio-cultural force (Richter 1989). Nonetheless, Hall (1995, 1) emphatically states “in short, tourism has an urgent need for public policy studies.” Apparently no one heard the call.

The Texas Nature Tourism Task Force report (1994) was a policy statement that aimed to provide guidance to the State to enter a new era of tourism development. Nature tourism creates a new set of challenges for tourism and for its policy makers. It stimulates new businesses that operate at a smaller scale than mass tourism. They may not be as resilient and are typically undercapitalized. They are also responsible for resource protection, but do not have the background and resources of government agencies. These small businesses can be overlooked by legislators and policy makers, but they actively reach out to agencies whose role it is to provide assistance. This level of tourism providers are people struggling to survive in challenging economic conditions.

Virtually all analyses of tourism policy are European. Krippendorf (1982) foresaw the dawning of the “ecotourism” era before the term became commonplace. He articulated the close ties between protecting resources and maintaining a healthy tourism industry.

Edgell’s (1983, 1984) articles examined the mechanisms for tourism policy making, driven by the National Tourism Policy Act of 1981, but no recent articles have evaluated tourism policy in the U.S., although tourism policy and planning are critical for the “orderly growth of tourism in the future” (Edgell 1982, 427). This is substantiated as we have observed tourism development efforts in Texas.

Possible Reasons Policy is Ignored in Tourism Research

Smith’s (1997: 149) assessment of tourism as an industry highlights why politicians and policy makers have shied away:

- Tourism is a non-traditional industry
- The tourism product depends on the effective integration of many different commodities
- Tourism data too often are incompatible, inconsistent, and not credible

The Texas Department of Economic Development echoes Smith’s points, highlighting the challenges created by tourism’s diversity. Government officials, business executives and the public have been slow to appreciate “the significance of travel away from home and the industry that has developed to serve it” (TDED 1998: 2). The agency suggests that these issues are a barrier to reaching tourism’s full potential while it also makes the industry “vulnerable to negative and unfair policy such as the governments proclivity to over-tax travelers to generate much-needed revenues” (TDED 1998: 2).

Also reflecting the diffuse character of tourism is the large number and diversity of state agencies, NGO’s and universities involved in nature tourism in Texas. These agencies, include the following:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Acronym</u>
Office of Rural and Community Affairs	ORCA

Texas State University—San Marcos	Texas State Univ.
State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism	State Task Force
Texas A&M University	Texas A&M Univ.
Texas Commission on the Arts	Arts Commission
Texas Department of Agriculture	Dept. of Agriculture
Texas Department of Public Safety	Dept. of Public Safety
Texas Department of Transportation	TxDOT
Economic Development and Tourism Office (previously Texas Department of Economic)	ED & Tourism Office
Texas General Land Office	General Land Office
Texas Historical Commission	Historical Commission
Texas Nature Tourism Council	Nature Tourism Council
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	Parks and Wildlife Dept.
Texas State Agency Tourism Council	Tourism Council
Texas Travel Industry Association	Travel Industry Association

This list could be expanded significantly if regional tourism or other economic development organizations were included.

EVALUATION OF NATURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TEXAS

State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism

As a concept, nature tourism has been recognized in Texas for a number of years.

However, as an industry is still in its infancy. The State Task Force on Nature Tourism formed in 1993 and was a 21 member committee (TPWD 1999a). The State Task Force defined nature tourism as “discretionary travel to natural areas that conserves the environmental, social and cultural values while generating an economic

benefit to the local community.” The following was the mission given to the State Task Force by Governor Ann Richards (STFTNT 1994)

1. Examine the potential of nature tourism in Texas.
2. Recommend opportunities for developing and promoting it.
3. Build upon local efforts already under way.
4. Preserve local, social and cultural values.
5. Promote sustainable economic growth, restorative economic development and environmental conservation through nature tourism.

Given this mission statement, the State Task Force made recommendations under four categories: conservation, legislation, promotion and education.

This article uses the recommendations for educational efforts as a framework to evaluate nature tourism’s progress. Educational efforts are the proper focus because they facilitate nature tourism product development in the state. The educational recommendations were (STFTNT 1994):

1. Develop a step-by-step nature tourism handbook targeted to communities and private landowners.
2. Provide training and outreach for local communities, individuals and companies to nurture and enhance nature tourism in their areas.
3. Enable the development of local tourism infrastructure to support the nature consumer’s needs.

4. Provide training for public and private sector employees who interact with the public concerning basic hospitality skills and nature tourism opportunities in their areas.
5. Identify and coordinate public private organizations with the financial resources and expertise to help communities and individuals in their nature tourism efforts.
6. Identify nature tourism products and infrastructure that are both available and needed to promote sustainable growth and environmental conservation.
7. Develop programs to communicate the importance of protecting and managing the state's nature resources.

These suggestions identify “technical assistance” activities for developing nature tourism. Evaluating what has been accomplished on these tasks can provide insights for future development needs. Table 1 is an overview of the status of the educational suggestions.

Var (1997: 204) recognized that these “recommendations do not give the responsibility for education to one agency. They emphasize the importance of cooperation and coordination of various public and private institutions.” Herein is a dilemma -- an effort to develop and promote a new and ambiguous endeavor like nature tourism cannot be left to its own momentum without leadership. While the intent to create a unified and cooperative effort is recognizable in these seven recommendations, they are not realistic in that responsibilities among state institutions were not clearly established. A review of progress, at the state level, reveals that progress has been made on a number of fronts but that these efforts have had limited coordination.

Government Agency Efforts to Develop Nature Tourism

Efforts to develop nature tourism in Texas are supported by several agencies, but it is difficult to separate efforts to promote general tourism from nature tourism. TxDOT and the Dept. of Economic Development do not have specific programs aimed at nature tourism.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. was designated as the “lead” agency for nature tourism. Before that time the agency did not fully recognize its role in tourism development, but the Executive Director from 1990 to 2001 was a strong proponent of nature tourism, including private sector activities (Howdeshell 2003, personal communication). More recently a collaborative effort being led by the Texas Cooperative Extension has developed several resources (publications, workshops, online resources and databases) that have been guided by the State Task Force’s vision. These resources will be discussed later.

Memorandum of Understanding and Legislative Changes Affecting Tourism

Development

This research was driven by one question—why has the development of nature tourism been so slow in Texas, given more than ten years of apparent state commitment to the industry? Our analysis identified at least two major obstacles for coordinated tourism development in Texas. The first are the Memoranda of Understanding (hereafter MOU) between the ED and Tourism Office, TxDOT, the Parks and Wildlife Dept., the Historical Commission, and the Arts Commission. These agencies are all members of the Texas State Agency Tourism Council. These agreements appear to be logical policy decisions that enhance coordination between a

large group of agencies, but, upon closer examination, they are probably the major obstacle to collaboration. A second significant problem for tourism development is the frequent restructuring of the “lead” tourism agency—the Economic Development and Tourism Office (renamed and reorganized Sept 2003).

Formation of the Memoranda of Understanding

The Tourism Council was established in 1988 to coordinate activities of various state agencies to meet the travel and tourism mission of the State. The Tourism Council produced the first Strategic Tourism Plan which was intended to provide a voluntary basis to clarify relationships and eliminate waste and duplication of services (Howdeshell 2003, personal communication). A cooperative agreement was created in the Strategic Travel and Tourism Plan of 1990. The impact of this agreement increased significantly in 1993 when it was formalized into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Texas Legislature. This was the same year that the Texas Department of Commerce was created by the state legislature which was an agency with a key role in tourism. The Dept. of Commerce was directed to enter a MOU with TxDOT and the Parks and Wildlife Dept. Before the MOU was signed it had to be adopted as administrative code within each of the agencies which, by itself, was a year-long process. After two years of work defining the roles for tourism development, the first MOU was signed. In this MOU the Dept. of Commerce was identified as the “advertising agency” responsible for promoting tourism, TxDOT was identified as the agency responsible for travel information centers, publishing and distributing travel literature, and the Parks and Wildlife Dept. was identified as the agency responsible for nature tourism development and outreach (Howdeshell 2003, personal communication).

The last MOU was mandated by the Texas Legislature during the 1999 legislative session. Riders were attached to the state agency appropriations bill that directed all five major tourism agencies to enter into a new MOU about responsibilities for tourism development. In this MOU two additional agencies were added, the Historical Commission and the Arts Commission (Howdeshell 2003, personal communication). The latest legislative “saga” was the 2003 session which was overshadowed by a \$10 billion dollar state budget deficit. For the tourism industry, the most important change was the total restructuring of the “lead” tourism agency (ED and Tourism Office). At this time it is still unclear what the structure of the agency will be. One major change is a 2/3 downsizing of the 30 staff in the tourism section of the agency. The agency will move under the direction of the Governor and be renamed the “Economic Development and Tourism Office”.

Since 1990 the “lead” tourism agency has had two name changes and two major organizational restructures. During these changes the state agencies have had to revisit the MOUs twice while the number of agencies included in the MOUs has also changed. As a result the MOUs have been a “moving target” and had a major impact on tourism development because they have the force of administrative law, as required by the Legislature in 1993. This has forced the agencies to be very deliberate and limits their potential to respond quickly to a rapidly evolving industry.

Texas State Agency Tourism Council

The regular attendees of the Tourism Council are the Dept. of Economic Development, TxDOT, the Parks and Wildlife Dept., the Historical Commission, the

Arts Commission, the Dept. of Agriculture, the Dept. of Public Safety, the General Land Office and Texas A&M Univ. Only the first five agencies listed above are mandated to participate in the quarterly Tourism Council meetings, however, the other 5+ agencies have been encouraged to attend. Participation is open and regular attendees have attempted to create a forum for information exchange, collaboration and coordination as representatives of an extensive state government.

Initially, the role of the Tourism Council was to oversee tourism literature and eliminate redundancy in printed materials produced by TxDOT and the ED & Tourism Office. In 1988 the Tourism Council produced the Strategic Travel and Tourism Plan (Tourism Plan) and intended to produce it every two years (TSATC 1994). The Tourism Plan laid out goals, strategies, and responsibilities for the state as a whole and for each of the participating state agencies. However, in 1994 the Tourism Council recognized that the document did not communicate effectively with the Legislature (its primary audience) and it was reformatted to a brochure reference piece (Howdeshell 2003 personal communication). As with coordinated tourism development efforts in the State, the efficacy of the Tourism Council and its efforts have been stifled by the MOUs and the tumultuousness of legislative policy changes.

Texas Nature Tourism Council (Association)

Among the recommendations of the State Task Force was the establishment of a non-profit industry organization. The Nature Tourism Association was established in 1995 as an educational subsidiary of the Texas Travel Industry Association. The Nature Tourism Association was formed to: “...educate individuals and communities on 1) How to expand their income through nature tourism; and 2) How to utilize and

preserve their natural resources for benefit and enjoyment” (TNTA 1999 n.p.). The State Task Force further outlined specific tasks to be accomplished by the Nature Tourism Association. Table 2 lists these tasks and provides a brief evaluation of progress to date. Membership of the Nature Tourism Association included landowners, tourism managers, regulatory agencies, tour operators, guides, conservation groups, chambers of commerce, convention and visitor bureaus and service providers.

In four years of operation, the TNTA did not generate sufficient membership to support itself. In early 1999 the Nature Tourism Association Board of Directors voted to dissolve the Nature Tourism Association as a separate organization and fold it into the Texas Travel Industry Association. It is now called the Texas Nature Tourism Council and operates as a committee within the Texas Travel Industry Association. Functionally, the organization has lost virtually all of its momentum.

The TNTA was not successful for several reasons. The Travel Industry Association provided financial and administrative support and originally hired a dynamic retired tourism professional for a short time to serve as Executive Director. This individual jump-started the organization, but when his term was complete there was no one to continue with the same level of energy and dedication. The second problem was financial. The Board of Directors felt that the membership fee should be kept low to encourage wider membership, especially considering that many nature tourism enterprises are poorly capitalized. Fees ranged from \$25 - \$50. However, this did not generate sufficient revenue to provide valuable services to its members, so the membership steadily declined.

University Efforts to Develop Nature Tourism

Two universities, Texas A&M Univ. and Texas State Univ.—San Marcos, are developing programs to address the growing demand for information, research and technical assistance for nature tourism development. Table 3 outlines programs that have been initiated.

The Nature Tourism Information Center developed by Texas A&M Univ. is probably the most positive movement towards addressing some of the educational suggestions outlined by the State Task Force. The program began with an intensive effort to listen to the potential audience—What information do they need, what are the best means for them to access information, how will they use that information? The program is now developing means to meet the needs of its audience.

The Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism at Southwest Texas State Univ. developed in 1997 out of a recognized need for information, research, and a supply of professionals that could enter the workforce of this burgeoning industry. It focuses on product development and management, with a special emphasis on interpretation.

Community Nature Tourism Development

Rural Texas communities have increasingly sought ways to diversify their economies, due to the oil and real estate crisis of the 1980's and the early 1990's (Var 1997). Numerous communities and regions are forming with an emphasis on natural resource amenity based tourism. Table 4 provides a summary (not comprehensive) list of some

of these organizations.

Private Sector Activities

The previous discussion should not suggest that enterprise level nature tourism development is not occurring in Texas. In many respects what has been accomplished in the state has been driven by grass-roots efforts. In the private sector ranchers and other landowners are starting entrepreneurial nature tourism endeavors to supplement their income. At present there are 420 tourism attractions and businesses in Texas INFRONT, a database designed to provide access and marketing assistance to smaller, harder to find resources via the Internet.

These enterprises are being developed in many forms. Some ranchers are expanding on already developed hunting programs, while others are focusing on non-consumptive activities like birding or wildlife watching.

Overlooked Issues

Both resource management/protection and interpretation have been almost completely overlooked as Texas has promoted nature tourism as a form of economic development. However, our country's long experience with public-sector nature tourism in state and national parks tells us that these are critical issues that should be given high priority.

Resource management/protection is especially critical because the entrepreneurial character of nature tourism may lead to overuse of sites. There are very few regulations that govern wildlife watching. Ranchers and other landowners may not

have funds to spend on resource monitoring, as is common in state and national parks. In addition, the management methods that are used in the public sector may not be directly transferable to the private sector. If a rancher depends on income from wildlife watching to secure the ranch's debt, he/she may not financially be able to close an area to let it regenerate, as is the case in a public area. Research into alternative and appropriate management methods is essential.

Interpretation, or lack thereof, is a problem because many landowners are not trained in either the substantive content or the methods of interpretation, yet interpretation is the core content of nature tourism. At present, neither the state agencies nor the universities have the resources or the responsibility to help private landowners develop this essential aspect of nature tourism. However, efforts are now underway by Texas A&M Univ. and Texas State University – San Marcos to use distance learning methods and technology to meet the need for interpretive training.

A call to action for examining, understanding and developing tourism policy

It is all too clear when one reads Hall (1994, 1995) and others that they have tried to motivate tourism researchers to venture in to the “murky waters” of tourism policy. Even while we attempt to ignore the issues, tourism policies will continue to be made—no matter what the quality of information the decision makers have. Economic conditions demand that decisions have to be made.

We should heed Krippendorf's (1982) suggestion that policy should be carefully considered to ensure a balance between economic development and environmental and social impacts. This wisdom can only be more important given the structure of

this “new” tourism industry. The implications of tourism policy now reach deep to the core of our society. Nature tourism is represented by a whole new group of businesses and attractions including small rural communities as well as non-traditional industries such as cattle raiser associations, wildlife federations, etc. These are groups that used to be associated with agricultural but now recognize new opportunities in “agritourism” which definitionally falls under the rubric of nature tourism. These groups live on the land, manage natural resources, and help sustain a population base outside of the cities. Their activities have significant environmental repercussions (positive or negative) and directly relate to some of the most important state and national issues including habitat preservation, water management, and food production.

Rural-based nature tourism is not just a new economic venture, and policy related to it has far-reaching implications. In Texas, as the population grows and shifts, policy decisions are being determined by urban areas because they represent 80 percent of the population. Because there is little understanding of the importance of rural areas to urban populations, rural people are becoming more marginalized. This raises the important policy question of the relationships between urban and rural populations. Do urban people receive benefits from rural people (e.g. to manage the resources that affect urban areas, or to provide recreational and cultural escapes)? Such questions present highly critical issues for policy makers who make decisions that alter the course of tourism development in rural areas, specifically nature tourism. However, tourism researchers have failed to raise these issues or to provide analyses that could help inform policy-makers. We believe this situation must be addressed. No matter

what the complexities or the implications of examining tourism policy, it is imperative that a dialog be started. Some questions that immediately arise are:

- At what scale(s) should policy decisions be made?
- Who should make policy decisions?
- How are resources to be allocated?
- How is continuity maintained in a tourism development effort given times of economic instability and political changes?
- What are the appropriate roles for government agencies, private industries, regions, communities, and universities?
- How can agencies that have dramatically different responsibilities and organizational structures be coordinated?

Further Research

Obviously, we believe more research should focus on policy development and implications. In addition, more research is needed about nature tourism development, operation, and management. Case-study research of enterprise-level nature tourism operations can identify issues that will help ensure that policy is properly focused. Also, a clearer understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of rural citizens can help focus policy to meet their needs.

Communities should also be given priority, as suggested many years ago by Murphy (1985). Currently communities are asking for assistance to better utilize their nature tourism resources. Tourism planners, on the other hand, are “being asked to use greater community participation in tourism planning” (Simmons 1994: 98). However, Simmons (1994: 106) discovered that the “public’s knowledge of tourism appears, at

best, to be barely adequate to instill confidence in the soundness of their contribution. Public education therefore has a key role to play...” in tourism planning. More research should be conducted on communities that have capitalized on nature tourism and what is learned should be provided to assist other communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The State of Texas has taken on the task of addressing the issues of nature tourism development, and regardless of the institutional and political challenges that it faces, it is clear that it should continue to forge ahead. It is apparent that the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits that can be reaped justify a patient and persistent effort--not to mention the potential negative environmental repercussions that could result from an unmonitored and unplanned development process. In light of these issues, this overview highlights some recommendations for state level efforts:

- An examination of tourism policy and decision making in the State.
- Effective coordination between government agencies and NGO's.
- Appropriate division of labor between government, NGO'S, communities and the private sector.
- Commitment of resources for R&D, technical assistance, and marketing
- On-going marketing and evaluation.
- On-going research on interpretation, resource protection, development, management, cost & benefits, and marketing.
- A concerted effort to “push the envelope” for the continued development of information technology utilization, e-tool development and distance learning opportunities.

Tourism is an ambiguous and difficult field of development (Smith 1997). Nature tourism, as a form of economic development at the community and individual level, is even more ambiguous in terms of responsibilities. The State of Texas and the various organizations in the state have ventured into these uncharted waters and have learned a great deal. As in any exploration, there have been some false starts and surprises. The effort here has been to set this experience in context, identify what has been learned and set the stage for the next phase of the exploration.

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Table 1. Summary of progress on educational tasks outlined by the State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism

Task	Responsible Organizations	Current Status
1. Handbook	TPWD, LCRA, TAMU, TDA and TNTC	TPWD produced the first, Texas Dept. of Agriculture compiled a second, and finally a collaborative handbook is being produced through Texas Cooperative Extension.
2. Training and outreach	None specified; however, current efforts involve TNTA, TPWD, EDTO, TAMU, and TSUSM	Needs assessment initiated in late 1998 by TAMU, TSUSM, TPWD, EDTO and TNTA but resources are insufficient to meet demand.
3. Development of local tourism infrastructure	None specified. TPWD, TxDOT, THC and local communities are taking initiative.	The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail established a nature tourism infrastructure along the Texas coast. The concept of "Trails" has become a major theme in Texas with a total of 44 already in place. However, those trails are sponsored by five different state or federal agencies and a variety of private organizations. There is no overall coordination.
4. Hospitality and opportunity training	None specified. EDTO, TxDOT, TPWD, and universities are making individual efforts.	Community Workshop Series for Tourism Development coordinated by EDTO includes workshop topic on nature/culture/heritage tourism as one of eight topics.
5. Financial assistance	None specified. TPWD, and TGLO offer some assistance to landowners and communities.	The TDA offers loan guarantees for tourism infrastructure development. TPWD's Landowner Incentive Program provides funding for protection of rare plants or animals. TGLO's Texas Coastal Management Program provides grants that include support for waterfront revitalization and ecotourism development.
6. Product and infrastructure identification for sustainable growth and conservation.	None identified. TSUSM TAMU, TPWD, and EDTO are making individual efforts.	Coordinated effort is lacking. To date a piece-meal effort being conducted by each agency. Currently efforts are being developed between these entities to advance this task.
7. Program development about importance of nature protection.	None identified. TPWD, EDTO, TAMU, TSUSM, TxDOT, TGLO	All programs being developed inherently address this.

Table 2. Tasks to be completed by the Texas Nature Tourism Association

Task	Status
1. Develop voluntary guidelines for nature tourism sites and providers.	TNTA developed and adopted a voluntary Code of Ethics for its members.
2. Assist in the promotion of nature tourism in Texas.	TNTA held three annual conferences and organized regional workshops. Lack of resources prevented TNTA from meeting the state-wide need for technical assistance.
3. Assist in developing and coordinating an overall marketing strategy and individual marketing elements for nature tourism.	The agencies with the responsibility and resources for overall tourism marketing did not have a specialized emphasis on nature tourism.
4. Establish a Texas Nature Tourism Information Center to provide centralized access for those seeking nature tourism and travel information.	Web page established that provides links to information sources and a searchable database of destinations in the state. The latter resource has been developed by Texas A&M—called Texas INFRONT.
5. Conduct demonstration programs in various regions of the state to show the benefits of nature tourism.	TNTA developed a curriculum for workshops, but did not have the resources to conduct them state-wide.

Table 3. University efforts to assist nature tourism development

Program	Status
Landowner Assistance Program, Texas A&M Univ.	<p>The first assessment workshops (in Kerrville, TX) 1998 for landowners. Participants identified and ranked informational needs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing • Education and information • Attitudes and psychology • Liability • Operations • Federal and state government resources
Nature Tourism Information Center	<p>Provides numerous information resources, technical assistance and online tools to help nature tourism constituents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Tourism Handbook • Marketing Workshop, etc. • Texas INFRONT • Nature Tourism Video • Financial Analysis Program • Tourism Market Evaluation Tools • List Serve <p>and access to a plethora of other publications, information and resources that are provided from other state agencies and organizations across the nation (http://naturetourism.tamu.edu).</p>
Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism, Texas State University—San Marcos	<p>Established to facilitate the development of nature and heritage tourism in Texas by conducting research on critical topics and to provide information and assistance to landowners and communities.</p>
Minor in Nature and Heritage Tourism, Texas State University—San Marcos	<p>An interdisciplinary minor that prepares students for professional work as program planners, developers, and managers.</p>

Table 4 Examples of regional tourism entities, organizations and marketing efforts

Name	Activities
Coastal Bend Regional Tourism Council	Organization supporting regional collaboration with communities, businesses and organizations on the central Gulf coast region.
Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail	First nature tourism project encompasses all of the Gulf coast from Beaumont to Brownsville.
Great Texas Wildlife Trails	Three other regional trails sponsored by Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.
Panhandle Tourism Marketing Council	Organization supporting regional collaboration with communities, businesses and organizations in the Texas panhandle.
Southwest Texas Tourism Partnership	Eight counties in the southwest central region of the state.
Texas Heritage Trails	Ten (10) Regional Heritage Trails Sponsored by the Texas Historical Commission.
Trans-Pecos Tourism Partnership	A new organization recently formed in Pecos county established to support nature based tourism on private lands.
Valley Partnership	Valley Chamber of Commerce—Lower Rio Grande Valley.
Visit Big Bend Tourism Council	Brewster county organization that promotes tourism mostly related to the Big Bend National Park.