

# MEDINA COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

## WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES



**Medina County Appraisal District**

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# **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

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## **Introduction**

Wildlife management is the latest major change to occur in agricultural use qualifications in recent history. In 1991, the first wildlife management law was passed, which allowed productivity appraisal for land used to manage indigenous wildlife. In 1995, Texas voters approved Proposition 11, which amended the original wildlife management law and allowed landowners to implement the law without fear of penalty. In 2001, the Legislature passed H.B. 3123, requiring the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to develop and the Comptroller to adopt rules for the qualification of agricultural land in wildlife management use.

The Comptroller of Public Accounts has published a brochure called "Guidelines for Qualification of Agricultural Land in Wildlife Management Use." The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has published "Wildlife Management Activities and Practices: Comprehensive Wildlife Management Planning Guidelines for the South Texas Plains Ecological Region." Both are to be followed in Medina County to qualify for wildlife management special appraisal.

## **Eligibility Requirements**

To qualify for agricultural appraisal under wildlife management, the land must currently be under agricultural use valuation. The law requires agriculture to be the primary use of the land. Wildlife management is an agricultural use under the law. Wildlife management must be the primary use of the property. Land that is used exclusively for recreation will not qualify for this special valuation. The Board of Directors for Medina County Appraisal District (MCAD) recommends a 50-acre minimum land parcel for wildlife management agricultural valuation in Medina County.

All properties under wildlife management must submit a valid application (1-d-1) and a Wildlife Management Plan. The application and plan can be obtained from the MCAD office. The forms are due between January 1<sup>st</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup> of the tax year for which the wildlife management valuation is being sought.

The Medina County Appraisal District requires wildlife management properties to:

- File an application to convert from agriculture to wildlife management
- File a five-year management plan
- File an annual update
- Be available for a field review when requested

A wildlife management plan should include:

- **Ownership information**
- **Property description and current use**
  - Map with size and location
  - Soil map or types of soil
  - Plants and trees already located on this specific property
  - Map identifying key locations of feeders, food plots, water, brush piles, prescribed burn area, etc.
- **Landowner's goals and objectives for the tract of land**
- **Specific indigenous wildlife species targeted for management** (Target animals)
  - Wildlife currently there and what you want to accomplish
  - Land usage (grazing, fishing, hunting, etc.)
- **Specific management practices to be implemented** (in support of the specific indigenous wildlife species targeted for management)
- **Landowner's signature, date and phone number**

We need to understand what is already done, what you plan to do next, and the 5-year goals you plan to accomplish. In summary, a wildlife management plan describes historic and current land use practices, establishes landowner goals and objectives for the property, and describes the specific activities and practices designed to benefit wildlife species of interest and their habitats. This is the landowner's plan, designed by the landowner, with the possible assistance of a wildlife biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas Agricultural Extension Service, USDA Natural Conservation Service (NRCS), Texas Forest Service, or other qualified wildlife biologist.

When getting ready to submit your plan be sure to note the following:

- Attaching additional information to your plan is encouraged. A map of the property showing the locations of certain parts of your management areas, such as food plots, feeders, shelters, brush control areas, etc. is highly recommended. If you wish to send pictures, you may print them on plain paper and print more than one to a page. Please date and label them so that we know what it is you want us to see and to know about your habitat.
- Please **do not** put your plans and future reports in a binder or book. It will save you money and will make it easier for us to scan your documents if the pages are not bound. If your documents are bound, they will still be accepted, just not processed as quickly.
- Sign and date your application and plan otherwise they are not valid. Include your phone number and email address so we may contact you if further information is needed.

## Current Use

The following must be met regarding current use of land:

- The primary use of the property must be for wildlife management. Hunting is not wildlife management. Hunting will not disqualify a property from meeting the criteria for wildlife management if it is a secondary use to the land.
- The land must be actively used to generate a sustaining, breeding, migrating, or wintering population of indigenous wild animals. (Exotics are not considered for wildlife management).
- The indigenous wildlife population must be produced for human use, including food, medicine or recreation.
- The property owner must perform at least three (3) of the seven (7) wildlife management activities specified by law; however, a complete plan will likely include all seven wildlife management activities. The seven wildlife management activities are:
  - 1) **Habitat control (habitat management)** — a wild animal's habitat is its surroundings, including plants, ground cover, shelter, and other animals on the land. Habitat control or management means actively using the land to promote an environment that is beneficial to the wildlife on the land. Removing harmful parts of the environment when necessary to benefit wildlife is also habitat management.
    - Grazing management? Prescribed burning? (If unable to meet prescribed burns due to burn bans, find another method for habitat control. A cattle grazing rotation plan may be a good substitute.)
    - Brush management? Fence modification? Range enhancement?
  - 2) **Erosion control** — any active practice that attempts to reduce or keep soil erosion to a minimum for the benefit of the wildlife is erosion control.
    - Pond repair? Gully shaping? Water diversion?
    - Plant establishment on erodible areas?
  - 3) **Predator control (predator management)** — this term means practices intended to manage the population of predators to benefit the owner's target wildlife population. Predator control is usually not necessary, unless the number of predators is harmful to the desired wildlife population.
    - Identify what the predator is
    - Describe how the predator is being controlled
    - Keep predator control logs
  - 4) **Providing supplemental supplies of water** — natural water exists in all wildlife environments. An existing stock pond, river, or natural waterway on your property is not providing supplemental water. Building a stock pond does qualify. Repairing a stock pond is handled under erosion control.
    - New well? Trough modification? Windmill overflow? Other wildlife watering facilities?

- 5) **Providing supplemental supplies of food** — most wildlife environments have some natural food. An owner supplements the food by providing food and nutrition in addition to the level naturally produced on the land. Using timed feeders and/or feeding corn are non-qualifying activities. If your plan includes food plots, planting a warm and cool season crop is required.
  - What feed? Feed for what animal? Map with feeder locations.
  - How many feeders? All year? How much? How often?
  - Food plots? Where? When? Every year? How do you plant? No till?
  - Mineral supplements?
  
- 6) **Providing shelter** — this term means actively creating or maintaining vegetation or artificial structures that provide shelter from the weather, for nesting and breeding sites, or providing "escape cover" from enemies. Annual maintenance (clean-out and repair) of nest boxes must be documented and submitted with the annual report.
  - Nest boxes? Brush piles? Half-cutting trees?
  
- 7) **Census counts to determine population** — census counts are periodic surveys and inventories to measure the number, composition, or other relevant information about the wildlife's population to determine if the current wildlife management practices are serving the targeted species. A census usually contains a minimum of two types of surveys and three dates.
  - Spotlight counts, game cameras, aerial counts, harvest data collection and record keeping, browse surveys, roost counts, call and covey counts, etc.

All wildlife management activities must be consistent with those recommended in the most current Texas Parks and Wildlife Activities and Practices: Comprehensive Wildlife Management Planning Guidelines for South Texas Plains.

**Acreage Requirement (TAC RULE §9.2005 - Wildlife Use Requirement)**

- A tract of land's wildlife use requirement is a number expressed as a percentage and calculated by subtracting one from the total number of acres in the tract of land and dividing the result by the total number of acres in the tract of land. The following formula expresses the calculation, with "x" representing the tract of land's total acreage:  $(x-1) \div x = \text{wildlife use requirement}$ . (For more information consult the TPWD website.) The Chief Appraiser, with the advice and consent of the Appraisal District Board of Directors, adopted the following requirements:
 

Individual tract:	50 acres
Wildlife management association tract:	20 acres
Endangered species:	20 acres
  
- If the number of acres in the tract of land is less than the number of acres in the tract of land on January 1 of the preceding tax year, the property is subject to the wildlife management acreage requirement.

## Annual Report

Once the wildlife management valuation is approved, the process is as follows:

- **The property owner is required to file an annual report to maintain the wildlife use valuation.** The report is a narrative description of the wildlife management performed the previous year.
- The annual report acts as a yearly update for the open-space valuation.
- The annual report is due by March 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.
- If the annual report (application) is received after the March 1<sup>st</sup> deadline but before the certification of the appraisal roll it is considered late. If approved, late reports (applications) will be subject to a penalty of 10% of the difference between the tax imposed on the property at agricultural value and the amount that would be imposed if the property were taxed at market value.
- If the property owner fails to submit a report before the appraisal roll is certified, the property will not receive the special valuation for that year.
- The report, PWD 888-W7000 (07/08), can be obtained from our office or from TPWD.

Information to include in your report:

- Copies of receipts (should include expenditures from each quarter)
- Map identifying key locations of activities being practiced
- Documentation of work
  - New projects started
  - Projects that have been completed
  - Projects that are in the planning stage and target completion date
  - Accomplished goals
  - Results seen from wildlife management activities practiced
  - Revaluation and adjustments to plan
- Records on all schooling and courses attended pertaining to wildlife management
- Landowner's signature, date, and contact phone number

A wildlife management property association may file a single annual report, if the report shows how the wildlife management plan was implemented on each tract of land in the wildlife management property association. The report shall be signed by each landowner or agent of the landowner. A landowner may file an individual annual report if they so desire.

## Field Inspections

MCAD performs routine on-site inspection and verification of all land in the open-space valuation program. Any property or portion of property that is found to be not in compliance with the requirements for the valuation will be dealt with in the appropriate manner. This action could range from a request for a new application, removal of the agricultural valuation, or removal of the agricultural valuation AND the initiation of a rollback, if the requirement for rollback is met.

## Summary

All wildlife must have food, cover and water to meet their daily requirements for survival. Therefore, wildlife habitat management is the manipulation of vegetation to provide these basic needs in a space where the targeted species can use them. When properly implemented, the wildlife management practices will, over time, transform the land from high intensity agriculture to the native grassland of the South Texas Plains ecological region.

It is very important that land managers today understand basic ecological principles of plant succession; plant growth; food chains; and water, mineral, and soil nutritive cycles as they affect range, wildlife and grazing management. This not only produces high quality habitat and animals, but also can lead to more stable conditions during stress periods such as droughts and winter.

Wildlife and habitat management should be directed at maintaining a productive and healthy ecosystem. All management activities should be aimed at conserving and improving the quantity and quality of soils, water and vegetation.

## Local Resources for Assistance

The following agencies may be of assistance during your wildlife management transition:

- **Texas Parks and Wildlife – (830) 876-8229**
  - Wildlife management guidance
  - Census assistance
  - General wildlife questions
- **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension (Texas Agricultural Extension Service) – (830) 741-6180**
  - Predator control
  - Brush management
  - Prescribed burning
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) – (830)-426-2521 ext. 3**
  - Pond erosion
  - Brush management
  - Wildlife management assistance
- **Texas Forest Service – (830) 792-8885**
  - Erosion control
  - Cedar management

## 1-d-1 Rollback Tax Penalty

Just as with agricultural use, if the wildlife use ceases to exist the property could be subject to a rollback of taxes. Refer to MCAD's Agricultural Guidelines for more information regarding the rollback of taxes.