



## Your Winter Report

# Protecting Texas old growth forests

East Texas is home to four national forests—Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Angelina and Sabine—home to 400,000 acres of mature forests. These forests are not just crucial allies in our race against climate change—they are also home to many species and areas of wonder.

Thankfully, our supporters and members like you are aware of the importance of these forests, and we were able to deliver more than one million public comments over four comment periods to protect old growth and mature forests from logging and development.

## Why we canvassed

Mature and old growth trees and forests are critical to addressing the biodiversity and climate crises, serving as unique ecosystems that support thousands of wildlife species and store significant amounts of carbon.

Following President Joe Biden's 2022 executive order directing the U.S. Forest Service to develop policies protecting mature and old growth forests in the National Forest system, the agency proposed a plan to change the way it manages old growth forests. The Biden administration then invited public input on the plan.

During the comment period, canvassers around the country knocked on doors to educate the public about the threats to our trees across the country, and built support for old growth protections by collecting public comments from supporters, including from members like you.

Along with those supporters, environmental organizations, indigenous-led organizations, federal and state elected officials,



*Texas' national forests are home to thousands of species of wildlife.*

faith groups and faith leaders, businesses, scientists and people across the nation submitted hundreds of thousands of comments across this period in support of strong protections for the nation's oldest trees and forests.

## Our forests are still at risk

Logging of older trees continues in our national forests. Chopping them down means we lose the benefits, and it takes decades or centuries to regrow them, if they can be regrown at all.

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Thanks  
for making it  
all possible

## Major step taken to 'get the lead out'

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently took a major step to get the lead out of drinking water: In October, the EPA set a 10-year deadline for most water utilities to replace lead service lines nationwide. This deadline is a significant step for public health as these approximately 9 million toxic pipes are the single largest source of lead in drinking water.

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, creating the third-largest federally protected marine area in the United States.

This new sanctuary, spanning 116 miles along California's Central Coast, represents a monumental step in preserving the nation's marine biodiversity and protecting one of the Pacific's most ecologically significant regions.

The sanctuary safeguards crucial habitats where key ocean currents meet, providing vital feeding and migration grounds for marine life, including whales, sea otters and numerous fish species. This designation opens the door to increased federal funding for scientific research, which will deepen understanding of ocean ecosystems and inform conservation efforts under changing climate conditions.

Made possible by over 100,000 comments, including from members like you, and a letter of endorsement signed by 181 scientists, this achievement promises to safeguard irreplaceable waters for future generations.

## Where does microplastic pollution come from? Often where plastic is made

Microplastic is showing up in our waterways and on our beaches. Facilities that make plastic pellets are one source of this pollution, so we set out to find where microplastics are coming from.

On July 31, Environment Texas and our partners at PIRG released an interactive map of these facilities based on data from the Environmental Protection Agency, so citizens can identify potential polluters near local water sources and homes.

An estimated 1 trillion plastic pellets enter the ocean each year and can take 100 to 1,000 years to break down. Because these pellets are small and lightweight, they are often spilled and end up in waterways where they can also be mistaken as food by wildlife.

"Turtles, birds and fish need waterways free from microplastic pollution, but if they live near one of these plastic-producing plants, they could be at risk," said Environment America's Executive Director Lisa Frank. You can find the tool on our website.

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Get more updates on our work online at <https://environmenttexas.org>.

CBS



John Rumpler speaks about lead in drinking water on CBS in March 2019.

Unfortunately, this new rule does not require water utilities to halt the widespread contamination of schools' drinking water, as urged by Environment America Research & Policy Center joined by parents and educators.

Lead in schools' water is especially dangerous because children's developing brains and bodies absorb lead more easily. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even low levels of lead exposure have been linked to a drop in IQ, attention disorders and impaired academic performance. That's why schools should install filters certified to remove lead at all taps used for drinking or cooking.

"The EPA's new deadline on lead pipes is a huge step forward for safe drinking water. Now we need state and local officials to take similarly bold action to help ensure that our kids have safe drinking water wherever they go to learn and play each day," said Environment America Research & Policy Center's Clean Water Director John Rumpler.

## Celebrating a new ocean sanctuary

Good news for our oceans: On Oct. 11, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) granted permanent protection from oil and gas drilling to the

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Unfortunately, many of these trees and forests in national forests are being logged and sold to timber mills because there are no meaningful protections for mature and old growth trees in most national forests. Texas sawmills pumped out more than 1.5 billion board feet of lumber in 2022, with around 20% of that harvested from our national forests. But we have a chance to change that in the coming months.

### What's next?

“If we are to restore old growth, combat climate change, preserve wildlife habitats and have forests for future generations to experience, we must change the way that we manage our public forests,” stated Luke Metzger, executive director of Environment Texas.

We will keep working to make sure that decision-makers recognize the truth that the public knows: old growth and mature trees are worth more standing.



Above right: Many trees in old growth forests are older than Philadelphia's Independence Hall (1753). Below: Public Lands Campaign Director Ellen Montgomery and staff help deliver more than 500,000 public comments to the U.S. Forest Service to protect old growth forests.



Glen Fortner

## Our mission

Environment Texas Citizen Lobby, Inc. is a policy and action group with one mission: to restore and protect the natural world.

Learn more about us by scanning the QR code below:



## Featured staff



Kimball Nelson

Luke Metzger  
Executive Director

As the executive director of Environment Texas, Luke is a leading voice in the state for clean air and water, parks and wildlife, and a livable climate. Luke recently led the successful campaign to get the Texas Legislature and voters to invest \$1 billion to buy land for new state parks. He also helped win permanent protection for the Christmas Mountains of Big Bend; helped compel Exxon, Shell and Chevron Phillips to cut air pollution at four Texas refineries and chemical plants; and got the Austin and Houston school districts to install filters on water fountains to protect children from lead in drinking water. Luke, his wife, son and daughters are working to visit every state park in Texas.

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# Environment Texas



## Your 2025 Winter Report

### Renewables on the Rise

The Renewables on the Rise dashboard allows you to track the growth of clean energy in your state and around the country. Explore your state's clean energy progress by scanning the QR code below:



### Surprising facts about renewable energy growth in Texas

Renewable energy continues to rise in Texas. According to Renewables on the Rise 2024, the eighth edition of our annual report on the state of clean energy in America, Texas now generates 7,016% more solar power than it did in 2014. Meaning that we can power an additional 10.2 million households each year with clean energy.

Here are three interesting facts about clean energy's growth in Texas:

1. Texas generated more solar energy in 2023 alone than all in-state solar generation before 2021 combined, enough to bring us to second in the national solar rankings.
2. Battery storage did not exist in Texas until 2014. Now we're second in the country.
3. There are now over 300,000 electric vehicles registered in Texas, ranking third in the country in terms of EV growth in the past 10 years.

"When we replace fossil fuels with wind turbines and solar panels, and curb wasteful uses of energy, we build a world where the planet and people can thrive," said Luke Metzger, executive director of Environment Texas.

*In just 10 years, solar energy generation across the country grew eight-fold, enough to power 22 million homes in 2023.*



Tim O'Connor