

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.C.R. 2
By: Flores
Water & Rural Affairs
6/25/2019
Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

For more than 120 years, the enforcement officers of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and its predecessors have patrolled the rivers, lakes, and coast of the Lone Star State, playing a central role in safeguarding the public waters. In 1895, the 24th Texas Legislature created the office of Fish and Oyster Commissioner, and in 1899, the Fish and Oyster Commission was given jurisdiction over all public waters, including freshwater streams, lakes, and ponds. The agency underwent several name changes over the years, becoming the Game, Fish, and Oyster Commissioner in 1907, the Game, Fish, and Oyster Commission in 1929, and the Game and Fish Commission in 1951, and since 1963, it has been known as the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In 1965, the professionals now known as Texas game wardens were tasked with promoting and enforcing water safety for persons and property in all recreational waters of the state. Since 1971, game wardens have been formally recognized as Texas peace officers, and in 1997, the 75th Legislature enacted House Bill 966, which required all game wardens to be certified as marine safety enforcement officers. In 2011, during the 82nd Legislative Session, game wardens were designated as the primary officers responsible for enforcing the provisions of the state's Water Safety Act.

Today, game wardens patrol the public waters of Texas to enforce hunting and fishing regulations and to promote water safety. They have expanded their ranks from six officers in 1919 to more than 500, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's fleet has grown to include more than 590 vessels, including two 65-foot patrol boats in the Gulf of Mexico and 26 SAFE boats for use along the Gulf Coast. In 2013, Texas game wardens were accredited by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators for their adherence to the U.S. Coast Guard's national standards for training, qualifications, and credentialing. In addition, Texas game wardens play a crucial role in homeland security and emergency management, including search, rescue, and recovery efforts. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, they were the first out-of-state peace officers to be deployed to New Orleans, where they were directly involved in the rescue of 4,940 people from homes, apartments, and hospitals, and during Hurricane Harvey, they rescued more than 12,000 Texans from the storm's floodwaters. In 2014, they took part in Operation Strong Safety, a homeland security initiative along the Texas-Mexico border.

The dedicated men and women who safeguard the public waters of Texas for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations truly deserve to be known as our "Lone Star Navy," and these individuals indeed merit recognition for their vital contributions.

RESOLVED

That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas recognize the game wardens of the Texas parks and Wildlife Department as the "Lone Star Navy" and commend them for their outstanding work as maritime safety enforcement officers.

That an official copy of this resolution be prepared for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as an expression of high regard by the Texas House of Representatives and Senate.