

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1520
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Economic Development
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 1520 establishes coordination by the General Land Office (GLO) to create a network of hike and bike trails, known as the Texas Bicentennial Trail, connecting the Alamo and State Capitol, and including connections to iconic landscape features between those two destinations. The bill allows GLO to ensure that the Bicentennial Trail is established on or before January 1, 2036. The completion of the trail will commemorate the 200th year after Texas' independence.

Under the bill, GLO will enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), political subdivisions, nonprofits, and the Texas Department of Transportation, that may address coordination of trail development, trail maintenance, acquisition of interests in real property for the trail, and conservation efforts along the 100-mile planned trail route. Real property acquired by the state under the bill may only be used for the purposes of the Bicentennial Trail. The bill makes it clear that eminent domain shall not be used to acquire the property.

In 2022, a study conducted by TPWD, with the help of other state agencies and partners, concluded that the biggest impediment to completion of large, comprehensive trail systems in the state is a lack of coordination between relevant state agencies and interested stakeholders.

Under S.B. 1520, the Texas Bicentennial Trail will connect existing trails and Texas historical sites into one project and coordinate the work of multiple state agencies to promote Texas historical and cultural heritage and outdoor recreation and enhance economic development in the state. Trails bring economic benefits to the state through direct benefits and costs saved. Recreational trails bring tourist dollars to a region, enhance property values, and the health benefits from trail usage translate to health care savings for individuals. Multiple analyses in other states and in a few areas of Texas confirm the more specific economic benefits of trails as a component of tourism, travel and leisure. Tourism, in all its many forms across the state, is already among the top 10 largest economic drivers in Texas (generating \$94.8 billion in spending in 2023). In 2023, Texas' outdoor recreation economy generated \$55.8 billion. Nearly 400,000 Texans work in the outdoor recreation industry as of 2023.

As proposed, S.B. 1520 amends current law relating to the establishment of a hike and bike trail to be known as the Bicentennial Trail.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the General Land Office in SECTION 1 (Section 31.5011, Natural Resources Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 31, Natural Resources Code, by adding Subchapter J, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER J. BICENTENNIAL TRAIL

Sec. 31.501. DEFINITION. Defines "hike and bike trail."

Sec. 31.5011. ESTABLISHMENT OF BICENTENNIAL TRAIL. (a) Requires the General Land Office (GLO) to coordinate the establishment of a hike and bike trail network for the purposes described by Section 31.502, with connections as described by that section, to be known as the Bicentennial Trail.

(b) Requires GLO to undertake to ensure that the Bicentennial Trail is established on or before January 1, 2036.

(c) Requires GLO, as necessary or convenient to coordinate the establishment of the Bicentennial Trail, to enter into memoranda of understanding with political subdivisions, nonprofit organizations, the Texas Department of Transportation, and other persons as necessary to establish and maintain the trail and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to acquire real property or interests in real property as necessary to complete the trail routes and concerning other matters related to the establishment of the trail or the maintenance of the trail and property associated with the trail.

(d) Authorizes a memorandum of understanding entered into under Subsection (c) to address certain matters.

(e) Authorizes GLO to adopt rules as necessary to coordinate the establishment of the Bicentennial Trail, including a timeline for the acquisition of real property and real property interests as necessary to complete the trail route.

(f) Prohibits real property or interests in real property necessary to complete the trail routes from being acquired through eminent domain.

(g) Provides that this section expires September 1, 2037.

Sec. 31.502. BICENTENNIAL TRAIL PURPOSES. Provides that the Bicentennial Trail is established as a network of hike and bike trails to connect the Alamo to the State Capitol and to include hike and bike trail connections to Barton Springs, San Marcos Springs, Comal Springs, and San Antonio Springs for the purposes of promoting outdoor recreation, environmental stewardship, and the historical and cultural heritage of this state.

Sec. 31.503. USE OF BICENTENNIAL TRAIL PROPERTY. Authorizes real property acquired by this state for the Bicentennial Trail to be used only for the purposes of the Bicentennial Trail.

Sec. 31.504. BICENTENNIAL TRAIL MAINTENANCE. Requires TPWD to maintain any real property acquired by the state for the Bicentennial Trail.

SECTION 2. Provides that the expiration of Section 31.5011, Natural Resources Code, as added by this Act, does not affect the validity of a memorandum of understanding entered into under that section.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2025.