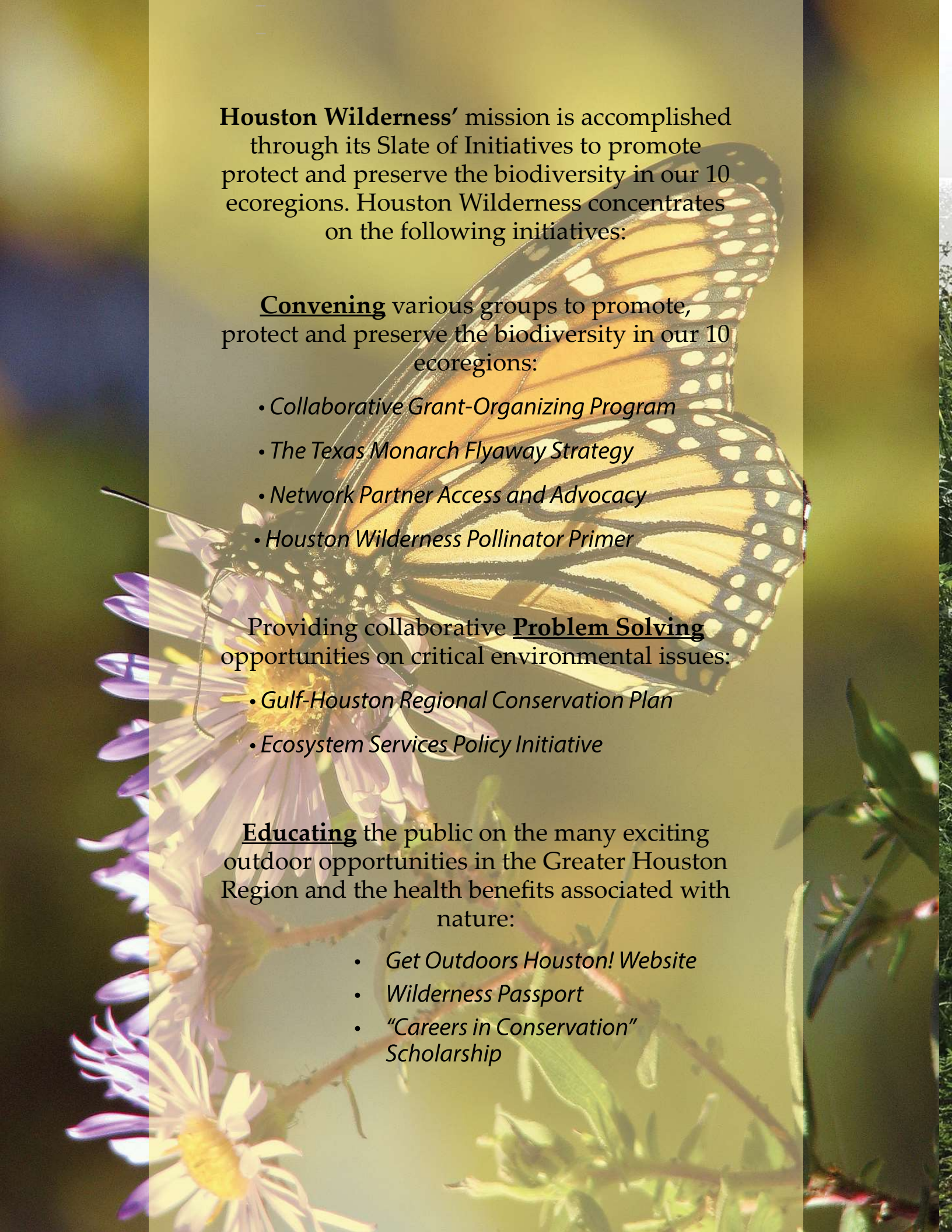
HOUSTON WILDERNESS

It's Our Nature

2018 Annual Report



Houston Wilderness' mission is accomplished through its Slate of Initiatives to promote protect and preserve the biodiversity in our 10 ecoregions. Houston Wilderness concentrates on the following initiatives:

Convening various groups to promote, protect and preserve the biodiversity in our 10 ecoregions:

- *Collaborative Grant-Organizing Program*
- *The Texas Monarch Flyaway Strategy*
- *Network Partner Access and Advocacy*
- *Houston Wilderness Pollinator Primer*

Providing collaborative **Problem Solving** opportunities on critical environmental issues:

- *Gulf-Houston Regional Conservation Plan*
- *Ecosystem Services Policy Initiative*

Educating the public on the many exciting outdoor opportunities in the Greater Houston Region and the health benefits associated with nature:

- *Get Outdoors Houston! Website*
- *Wilderness Passport*
- *"Careers in Conservation" Scholarship*

Table of Contents

2018 Recap from the President 4-5

Houston Wilderness
Accomplishments 6-7

Gulf-Houston Regional
Conservation Plan 8-9

Collaborative Grant
Organizing Program 10-11

Ecosystem Services 12

Great Green Quest and
Wilderness Passport 13

2018 Annual Luncheon 14-15

Texas Monarch Flyway Strategy..... 16

Financial: Fiscal Year 2017-2018 17

2018 Donors 18-19

Board of Directors and
Staff Listing 20-21

2018 Recap From The President

HOUSTON WILDERNESS
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As the region began to bounce back from Hurricane Harvey, Houston Wilderness staff and board were busy working with regional stakeholders on a variety of existing and expanded programs to better protect, preserve and promote the 10 ecoregions that make up the biodiversity of our 13+ county area. Houston Wilderness' continued facilitation of the 8-county *Gulf-Houston Regional Conservation Plan* (RCP) included solidification of three Key Goals for the region. In addition to continue providing the online interactive database of all targeted nature-based infrastructure projects in need of full or partial funding in the region, the three Key Goals of the RCP include: (1) Increasing the current 9.7% in protected/preserved land in the eight-county region to 24% of land coverage by 2040, (2) Increasing and supporting the region-wide land management efforts to install nature-based stabilization techniques, such as riparian and upland low-impact development, living shorelines, and bioswales, to 50% of land coverage by 2040, and (3) Providing research and advocacy for an increase of 0.4% annually in air quality offsets through carbon absorption in native soils, plants, trees, and oyster reefs throughout the eight county region.

Meanwhile, under Houston Wilderness' *Collaborative Grant-Organizing* (CGO) program, the *Port of Houston Trees & Riparian Enhancement of Ecosystem Services* Project (PoH TREES) is an example of a local collaboration contributing to the Gulf-Houston RCP. Houston Wilderness, City of Houston Health Department, Trees for Houston, Port of Houston, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, and private companies have partnered to research and monitor environmental variables that affect air and water quality and riparian habitats along 25 miles of the Port of Houston, a major connected port and waterway of the Gulf Coast and Intracoastal Waterway.

To implement the PoH TREES program, the partners will: (1) divide the 25-mile segment of the riparian corridor into sections, (2) place air and water quality and sediment monitoring devices along the waterway, (3) navigate the waterway to identify and record trees and plants throughout the corridor sections and create a baseline of ecosystem services, (4) work with adjacent land owners to restore the riparian buffers by removing invasive plant species and replacing them with native trees and grasses, and (5) analyze and quantify data collected at all stages (pre and post restoration) to produce short and long term measurable results on ecosystem services and function improvements as a result of the restoration. This project will allow the Port of Houston and other public/private stakeholders to quantify air and water quality offsets and erosion control over the next 5-25 years, and will create 50+ jobs, having a substantial impact on the local community and economy. Another CGO program that saw expanded growth in 2018 is the *Texas Monarch Flyway Strategy* which continues to build in interest and in number of acres of pollinator habitat being created in the state.

Due to an escalation of interest in regional resilience for Greater Houston/Harris County, Houston Wilderness was asked to provide policy briefs on regional soils and nature-based infrastructure techniques such as low impact development, bioswales and other green stormwater infrastructure options. HW will also be facilitating a series of forums beginning in 2019 on a variety of nature-based infrastructure (NBI) issues in our region, including large-scale federal/state coastal resilience projects, native grass sod creation for large landscape and riparian areas, development and engineering NBI trends, RCP goal metrics for nature-based stabilization techniques and multi-county coordination of resilience issues.

Houston Wilderness' Great Green Quest program continues to grow, with 35,000 passports distributed throughout the year to numerous schools, YMCA locations, regional libraries and community centers. We also provided five GGQ Careers in Conservation scholarships to five graduate level students in the region.

We are grateful to the many foundation and corporate sponsors, individuals and board members who provide support to Houston Wilderness and its environmental programs and initiatives. Onward to 2019!

Sincerely,

Deborah January-Bevers
President & CEO, Houston Wilderness

Houston Wilderness Accomplishments 2003-2018

I. Ecoregion Advocacy through Convening & Problem-Solving

- **Creation of the Vision of the Major Eco-regions of Greater Houston and surrounding counties** – Houston Wilderness (HW) led the creation and facilitation of the first-ever recognition of ten (10) connective eco-regions in the multi-county area surrounding Houston (see http://houstonwilderness.org/about-ecoregions/) (circa 2003)

- **Atlas of Biodiversity** - Written and Produced by Houston Wilderness, the Houston Atlas of Biodiversity is a major publication that focuses on the seven major eco-regions of the greater Houston area including Big Thicket, Coastal Marshes, Coastal Prairies, Columbia Bottomlands, Piney Woods, Post Oak Savannah, and Trinity Bottomlands. As the only serious publication to date that explores the interconnected of Houston eco-regions, the Atlas is a resource for scientists, students, conservationists, policy makers and the public. (2007 - present)

- **Sam Houston Greenbelt Network (Phase I, II & Final)** – In 2007, HW created a vision for a 650 mile green "necklace" that connects the region's ecosystems as a multi-use Regional Trail traversing 13 counties, offering various recreational activities for its users. This work led to HW's current development of the *Sam Houston Greenbelt Network*. Then, in 2014, HW collaborated with a group of 40+ steering committee members to create the 8-county *Gulf-Houston Regional Conservation Plan*, coalitions along the Brazos and Trinity Rivers and many other collaborative efforts to increase biodiversity in the region (2007 – 2013).

- **Gulf-Houston Regional Conservation Plan (Gulf-Houston RCP)** - HW works with a network of environmental, governmental, and business groups in the Greater Houston region on the RCP, including facilitation of a GIS map database and the Gulf-HoustonRCP.org website. Under the Gulf-Houston RCP, HW tracks the number of Phase I and II Working List of Projects, the numb In 2018, t he RCP's network of partners worked together to create and begin implementation of three Key Goals for the region. In addition to continuing to provide the online interactive database of all targeted nature-based infrastructure projects in need of full or partial funding in the region, HW is now facilitating implementation and related policy research on these three Key Goals: (1) Increasing the current 9.7% in protected/preserved land in the eight-county region to 24% of land coverage by 2040, (2) Increasing and supporting the region-wide land management efforts to install nature-based stabilization techniques, such as riparian and upland low-impact development, living shorelines, and bioswales, to 50% of land coverage by 2040, and (3) Providing research and advocacy for an increase of 0.4% annually in air quality offsets through carbon absorption in native soils, plants, trees, and oyster reefs throughout the eight county region. (2013 - present)

- **Texas Monarch Flyway Strategy (MFS) -** Under HW's Collaborative Grant-Organizing (CGO) Program, HW has expanded its Monarch Flyway Strategy, which continues to build in interest and in number of acres of pollinator habitat, from an 8-county initiative (Gulf-Houston MFS) to a Tri-Regional MFS to, now, a statewide *Texas Monarch Flyway Strategy*. (2014- present)

- **Lower Trinity River Project –** Actively spearheaded by the five county judges of the counties that make up the Lower Trinity River, this new group has met four times and is working on major ecotourism and other advocacy needs of the Lower Trinity. HW facilitates the meetings and agendas for these meetings and related action items as needed every year. (2015 - present)

- **Network Partners Development –** HW has expanded its network of environmental and conservation partners to over 150 in the Greater Houston Region that work together to preserve, protect and promote sustainable land, water and wildlife in our Region. (circa 2003)

- **Green Think Tank –** Led by Houston Wilderness board members, this collaborative group discussed large land and water conservation issues affecting the region. Results have included two publications on potential economic and environmental impacts for the Upper Texas Gulf Coast Region over the next 20 years and development of a proposed "National Recreation Area. (circa 2010)

- **Creation & Distribution of an Ecosystem Services Primer –** Beginning in 2013, HW created a policy paper that listed all major ecosystem services studies in the Greater Houston Region and relevant regional ecosystem services information with valuations options for water supply and quality, erosion control, stormwater protection, air quality, carbon and energy savings and recreation This document has now been published as an *Ecosystem Services Primer* by HW that provides both analysis and policy goals for protecting and increasing ecosystem services in the Greater Houston Region. HW staff also provide presentations to various conferences around the US throughout the year providing a broader base of knowledge about the Greater Houston Region. A second edition will be published in 2019 (2014 – present)

- **Creation of the Collaborative Access Program (CAP)** – In 2017, the Collaborative Access Partnership (CAP) Program took on a new name - **Network Partner *Access & Advocacy*** Program, providing problem-solving assistance and facilitation of various environmental policy issues that benefit various parts of the seven land-based and three water-based eco-regions, particularly concentrated in nature-based infrastructure following the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. (2013 - present)

- **Collaborative Grant-Organizing (CGO) Program** - A priority "Convener" role for HW, this program has grown exponentially this year and includes assistance in packaging large federal/state funding proposals and facilitation of awarded grants that help protect and preserve areas of the Gulf-Houston RCP and provide more pollinator habitat funding throughout Texas. To date, HW and a variety of different regional partners have received funding from over ten CGO grant proposals totaling over $1 million in additional funds to the region for land and water conservation efforts. the *Port of Houston Trees & Riparian Enhancement of Ecosystem Services* Project (PoH TREES) is an example of a local collaboration contributing to the Gulf-Houston RCP. Houston Wilderness, City of Houston Health Department, Trees for Houston, Port of Houston, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, and private companies have partnered to research and monitor environmental variables that affect air and water quality and riparian habitats along 25 miles of the Port of Houston, a major connected port and waterway of the Gulf Coast and Intracoastal Waterway. (2013 - present)

II. Eco-Region Advocacy through Education

- **Completion, implementation, and maintenance of the Wilderness Passport –** In 2018, HW distributed over 35,000 Family and/or Ecotourism Passports, including providing Passports to multiple regional public schools, park community centers, regional libraries, the Houston Zoo, boy scouts, and YMCA centers through its *Great Green Quest* (GGQ) program. (2006 - present)
- **Convening partner in Get Outdoors Houston! –** Hundreds of stakeholders in the region are now engaged in promoting nature and outdoors locations to visit in Greater Houston to encourage citizens and visitors to explore and enjoy the ecological treasures of the region. (2014-2018)
- **Great Green Quest "Careers in Conservation" Scholarship Program –** Houston Wilderness awarded 5 scholarships to graduate level students around the region in 2018 under the GGQ "Careers in Conservation" Scholarship Program that will be open to interns and staff in the environmental community interested in pursuing graduate-level work in an environmental field.

Gulf-Houston Regional Conservation Plan

Land Cover by County

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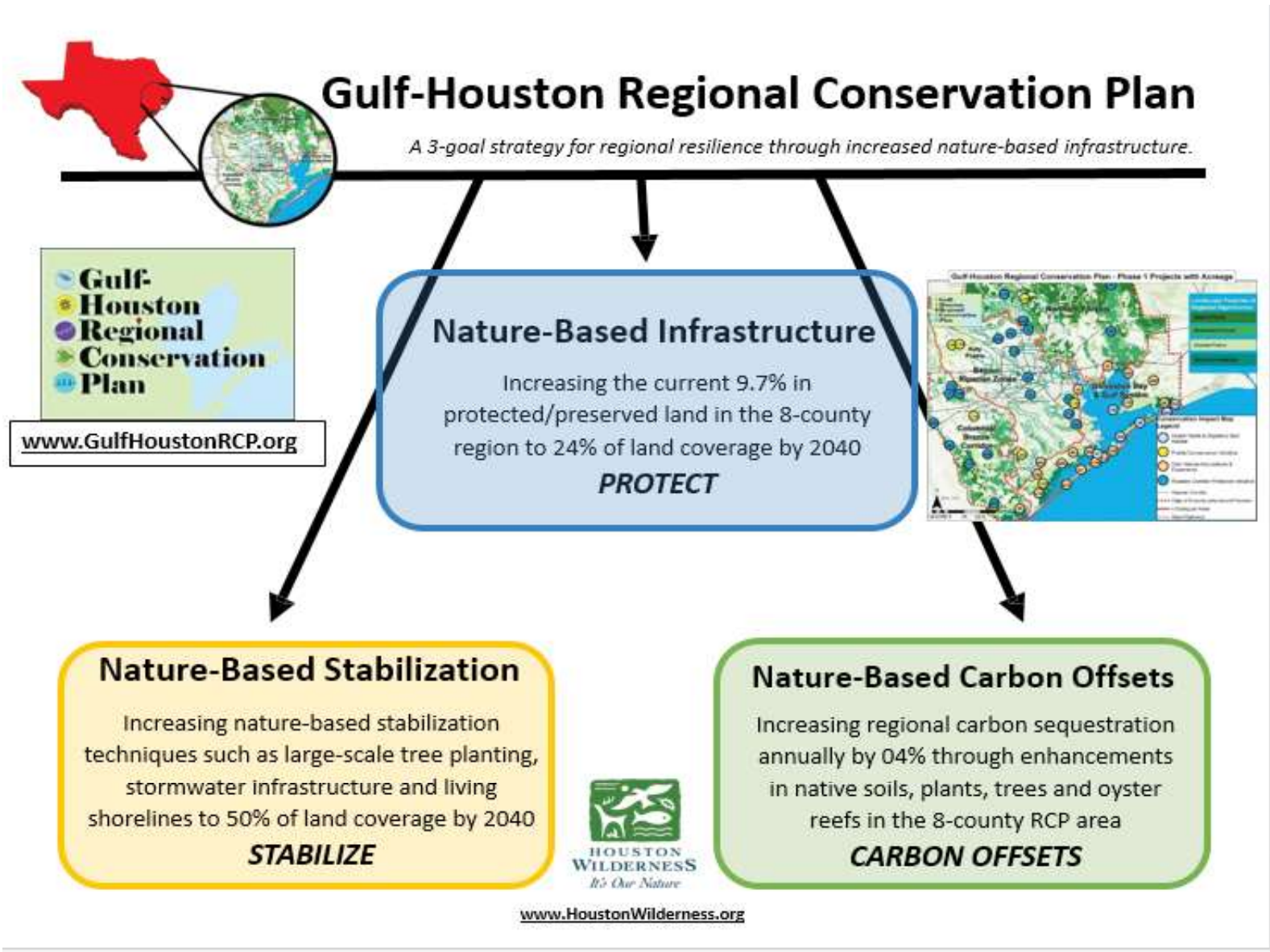
County	Total Land Cover (acres)	Total Developed Land & Protected/ Preserved % (per county)	Land Currently Protected in 8-county region % (w/ acres)	Available Undeveloped Land and Targeted %
Harris	1,095,040	51% (12%)	**2.7%** (132,000)	46.5% (2.8%) (136,000)
Montgomery (28% by 2040)	663,616	32% (10%)	**1.4%** (68,198)	66.6% (2.5%) (121,782)
Fort Bend	554,624	25% (.43%)	**0.5%** (24,356)	74.6% (2.5%)
Liberty	740,096	13% (.46%)	**0.7%** (34,099)	86.3% (1%)
Waller	326,336	12% (.30%)	**0.2%** (9,742)	87.8% (1.8%)
Galveston	235,008	10% (10%)	**0.5%** (24,356)	89.5% (1.8%)
Brazoria	878,080	10% (15%)	**2.7%** (131,524)	87.3% (.6%)
Chambers	378,496	8% (17%)	**1.3%** (63,326)	90.7% (1%)
Total	**4,871,296**	**26%**	**10% (487,130)**	**64.4% (1,169,111) (14%)**



www.GulfHoustonRCP.org

Collaborative Grant Organizing

The CGO Program serves a fundamental role to the environmental community as a regional initiative targeted at coordinating multiple organizations as they seek funding for large-scale projects in order to leverage resources and magnify the effect of their efforts through collaboration.

In the past year, Houston Wilderness, with its CGO program partners, submitted 20 collaborative proposals requesting a total of over $2 million in potential funding to the region. Granting entities included the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, Texas Parks and Wildlife, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Texas Commission on Environment Quality, among others. In 2018 Houston Wilderness began implementing 3 additional CGO Grants. Since the beginning of the CGO Program, fourteen (14) grants totaling $1,075,000 have been awarded through the CGO program.

Projects span all ecoregions, and focus on coastal wetlands and shorelines to prairie restoration, bayous and pollinator habitat.

HPARD Seeding funded by CGO grant

One of many Pollinator Gardens planted throughout the Greater-Houston region, under the *Monarch Flyway Strategy* grant

Photos from CGO Grants facilitated by Houston Wilderness in 2018:

14
Collaborative Grants Awarded since 2014,
$1,075,000 in Funds Received

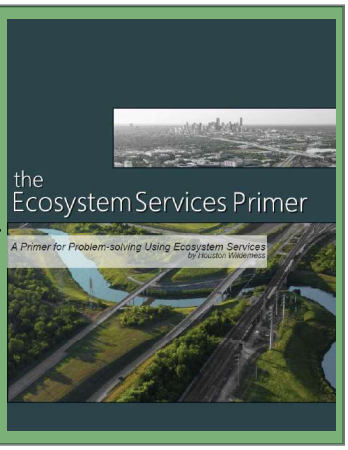
Prepping for creation of oyster reefs for the *ConocoPhillips SPIRIT of Conservation and Innovation: Gulf-Houston RCP Galveston Bay Oyster Reefs & Migratory Bird Habitat* grant

Ecosystem Services

Ecosystem Services (ESS) **are the benefits that humans derive from nature that provide economic value**

Houston Wilderness continued ESS presentations at several ecological conferences in 2018 using the "Primer for Problem-Solving Using Ecosystem Services" as a reference. Houston Wilderness created the Primer specifically to provide users with explanations of the kinds of ecosystem services that exist in the Greater Houston Region, how they work, how to determine their value, and how ecosystem services may be used in designing large-scale infrastructure, conservation or land-use solutions.

The Primer is available free of charge and by donation at www.houstonwilderness.org/ecosystem-services. Hard copies are also available upon request.



Ecosystem services (ESS) are the benefits that humans derive from nature that provide economic value. By living alongside natural ecology and allowing ecosystems the space to perform their self-sustaining functions, we are able to enjoy the goods and services these functions yield. In doing so we save time, effort, and precious resources that would have otherwise been used to design technological interventions for the same outcome.

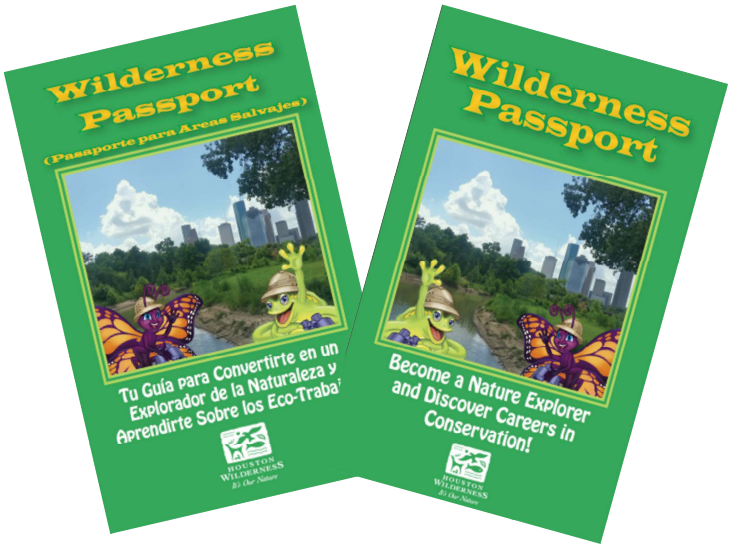
This Primer is meant to serve as an overview of the most up-to-date research on ecosystem services as well as offer a structured valuation methodology for the Houston region. It is intended to be useful to the policymaker in designing large-scale infrastructure, conservation, or land-use solutions while also offering a means of accounting by which business leaders and other private stakeholders may value their natural capital and its potential for improvement.

Great Green Quest and Wilderness Passport

The 2018 Great Green Quest (GGQ) connected children, students and families to their natural world via distribution of 35,000 Family Wilderness Passports to area school districts, Houston Parks and Recreation Department's community centers, area libraries, youth organizations, and children's museums. The Family Wilderness Passport program and Great Green Quest help meet the essential need that our region's natural areas are visited, enjoyed and valued. That ever-evolving technologies and social media are integral to the way we live is undeniable, so it is vital to ensure that this linkage to the wired world does not occur at the expense of our connection to nature and its many benefits. The Family Wilderness Passport is an outdoor nature resource guide that details the 10 ecoregions that make up the Houston Wilderness coverage area. The Passport has information on a variety of parks, preserves, nature centers, and refuges that boast amazing wildlife viewing opportunities, outdoor recreation, and truly beautiful landscapes. There are over 55 parks, preserves and nature centers in the Family Wilderness Passport that can be visited over the summer by Great Green Quest participants, and most of them offer environmental education programs that explain – in a fun, engaging way – how natural habitats serve both wildlife and human populations. The Great Green Quest (GGQ) is an interactive educational experience that gets kids interested and involved in their natural surroundings over the summer months. Along with our Family Wilderness Passport, the GGQ encourages family "field trips". Students who participate are given a Houston Wilderness passport, Quest Activity Log, and an informational flyer that provides details on how to compete with other students and schools to become a "Top Quester." In its fourth year, the GGQ connects kids to nature and ultimately fosters appreciation for the benefits that it provides.

Houston Wilderness has a popular version of the Family Wilderness Passport that includes a "green jobs" component to showcase several conservation and/or environmental careers in each ecoregion and provides information about the educational requirements needed to pursue them. The "Green Jobs" Passport is also bilingual, providing information in both English and Spanish.

For more Information visit:
www.HoustonWilderness.org/GGQ



The English/Spanish "Green Jobs" Passport

2018 Annual Luncheon

The 2018 Annual Luncheon, enthusiastically co-chaired by the "Covey of Chairs", honored the Quality of Life (QoL) Coalition with the presentation of the fifth Annual Wild Life Award, which recognizes transformative contributions to the conservation and preservation of our region's important natural landscapes.

With 12 honorees in the Quality of Life Coalition, this diverse and dedicated group collectively made it their mission to protect, preserve and promote our region's rich ecological diversity, both personally and professionally and we're honored to highlight their combined contributions to our region's natural spaces. Beginning in 2000, these community leaders formed a Steering Committee for the collaborative QoL Coalition, made up of over 100 civic, business and governmental organizations working together to create substantial changes to the face of Greater Houston.

Their shared vision, coupled with passion, coordination and dogged determination to improve our region's quality of life, resulted in completion of an extensive four-part Quality of Life Agenda, ultimately adding millions of trees to our freeway corridors and other rights-of-way, creating a network of trails, parks and green spaces along 10 major bayou corridors, and significantly reducing billboards, litter and graffiti blight on our urban landscapes.

The Quality of Life Coalition Honorees with Luncheon MC, Beth Robertson and Co-Chairs, Kelly Frels and Lee Lahourcade

See 2018 Luncheon video at:
www.HoustonWilderness.org/Past-legacies

Texas Monarch Flyway Strategy (Texas MFS)

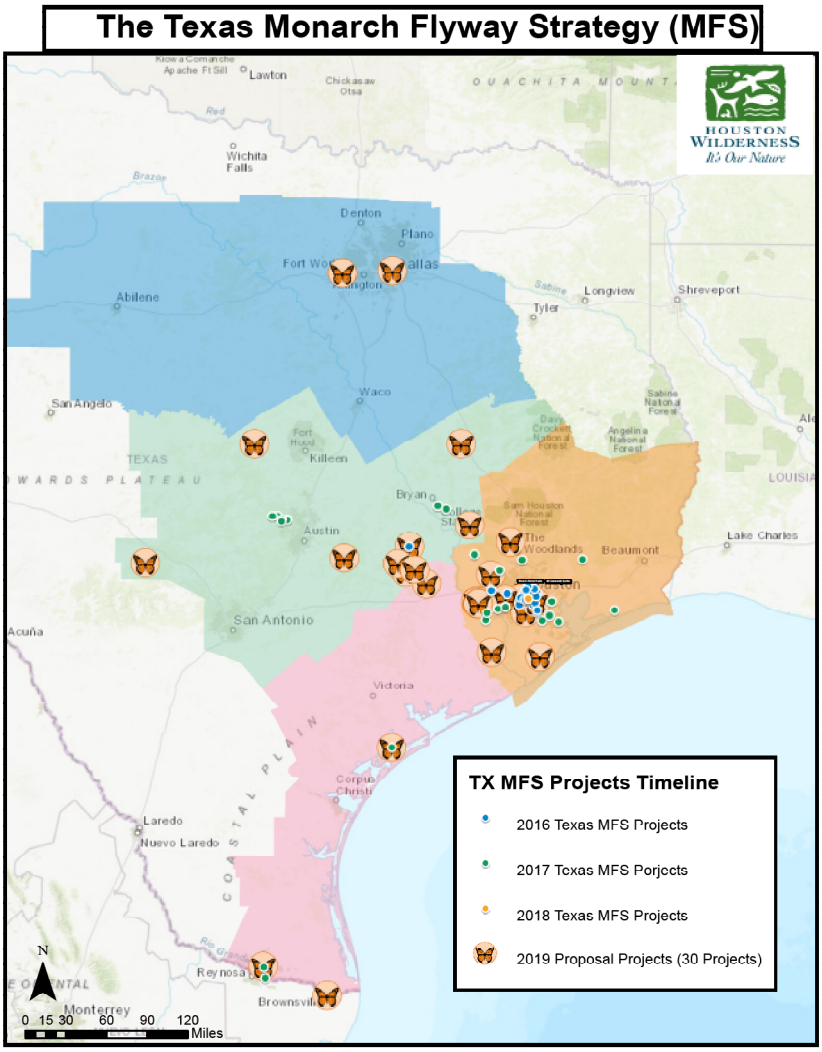
The Texas Monarch Flyway Strategy (Texas MFS) was created in conjunction with the Texas Parks & Wildlife's Department's Monarch Conservation Plan in April, 2016. The Texas MFS concentrates on substantial increases in Monarch populations by working with partners around the state to (1) increase pollinator habitat, (2) provide education and outreach, (3) collaborate with other stakeholders and (4) coordinate pollinator research to assist interested people/partners.

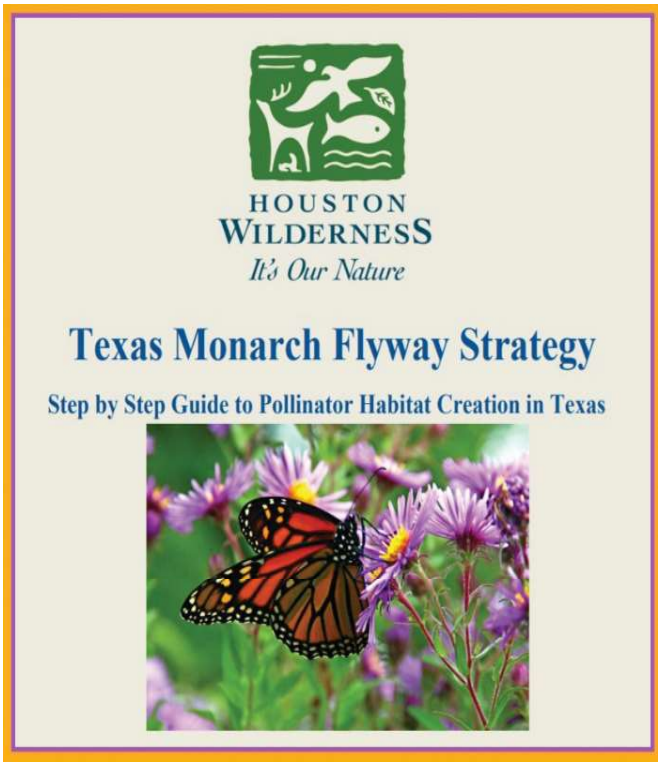
With the assistance of NFWF Monarch Conservation grant funds, the Texas MFS seen success in all four targeted areas, helping to restore, increase and enhance Monarch habitat across four major regions in the state -which all serve as critical links in the Monarch butterfly's journey along the Central Flyway from Canada to Mexico and back every year.

By facilitating collaborative funding from various federal, state and regional sources, Houston Wilderness is working with federal and state agencies, biologists, multiple municipalities, private and public land owners, schools and nonprofits to enhance or restore thousands of acres of habitat for Monarch butterflies and other pollinators throughout Texas.

With multiple completed and ongoing projects along the Texas MFS, partners are currently collecting various native milkweed and pollinator plant seeds and plugs for distribution to collaborative partners around the state. Current and future partners are also focused on increasing the supply of milkweed seeds and the variety of native pollinator species across all types of property in the state.

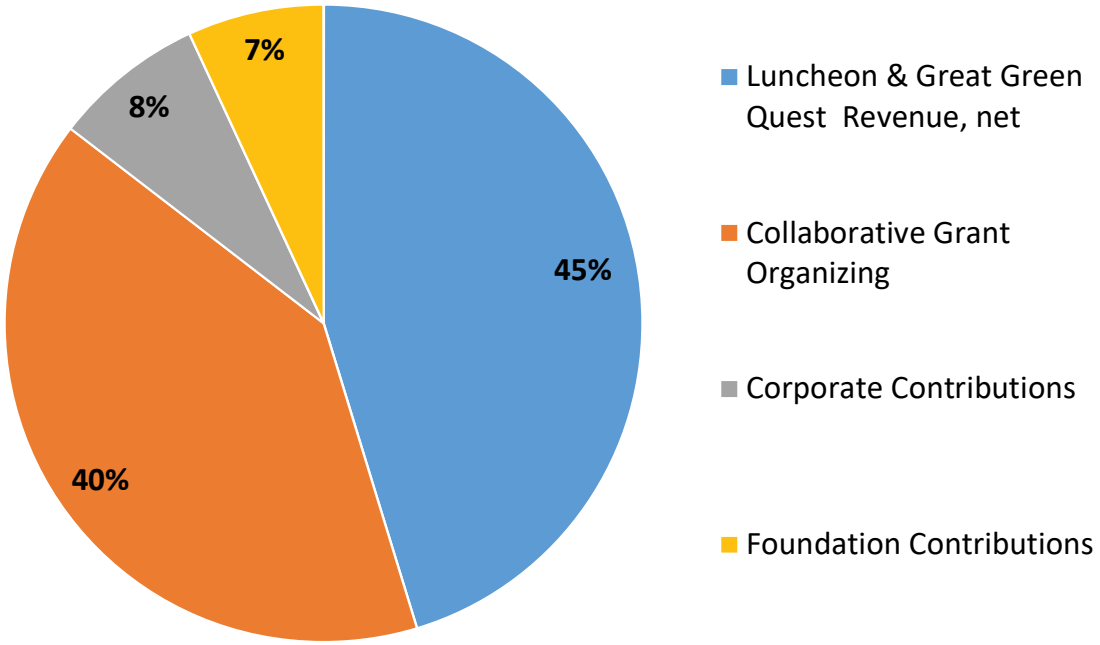
Visit www.HoustonWilderness.org/MFS to read our Step-by-Step Pollinator Habitat.



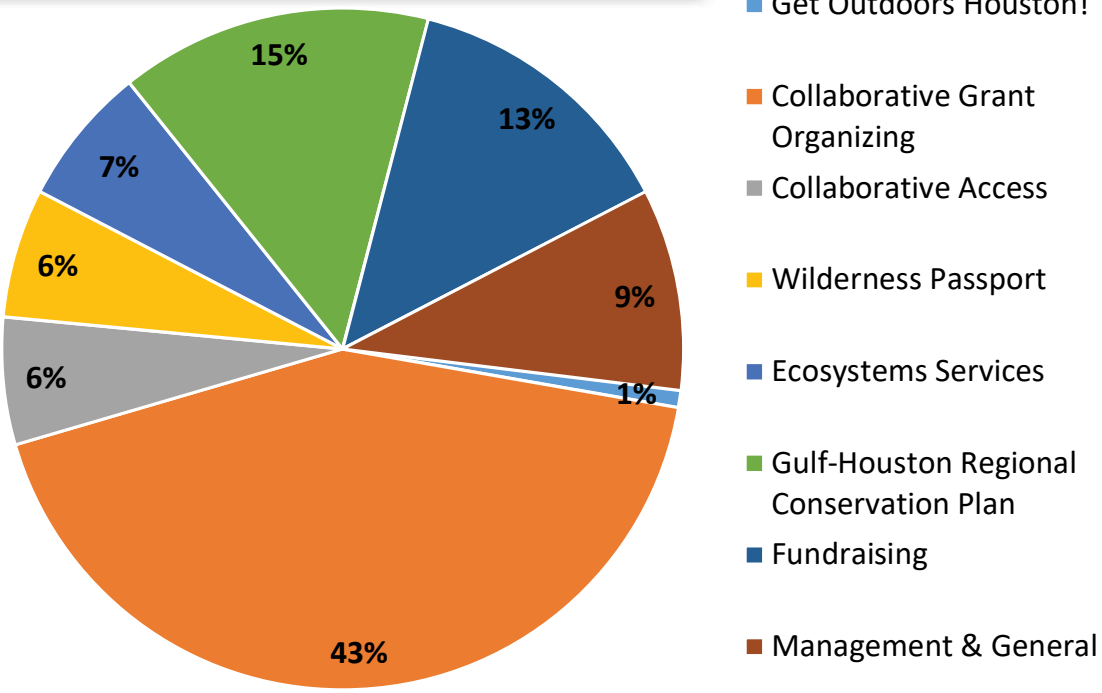


Financial: Fiscal Year 2017-2018

Revenue



Expenses



Thank You to our 2017-2018 Donors

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$50,000 +

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- Shell

$25,000+

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- Hamman Foundation
- Beth Roberston
- Cullen Geiselman
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$10,000+

- OKRA Charity Saloon
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$1,000+

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Facilitating opportunities to preserve 10 ecoregions by
Convening, Problem-Solving & Educating.
HoustonWilderness.org