

## **Texas Study Supports Need to Protect Coastal Ecosystems**

Texans are willing to contribute financially to protect the state's bays and estuaries and to pay more for recreational trips to experience these coastal ecosystems, economic researchers have found, according to a June 27 press release.

Those were among the key findings of two reports released by the Valuing Nature in Texas program of the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC), based in The Woodlands, and the Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Almost 1,000 individuals in the Coastal Bend and Lower Rio Grande Valley participated in the survey.

The reports detail the results of "The Economic Value of Water and Ecosystem Preservation in Texas," a two-part research project examining the economic value of freshwater inflows that support the sensitive estuaries and coastal wetlands in two important locations: San Antonio Bay on the Central Texas coast and the Rio Grande Estuary at the state's southernmost tip. Research areas included ecotourism and commercial fisheries. The research received financial support from The Meadows Foundation of Dallas and the Texas General Land Office.

Surveys revealed that residents and visitors to the San Antonio Bay and Rio Grande Estuary regions would be willing to contribute more than \$120 each to protect freshwater inflows from rivers and streams. Extended to relevant larger populations, these responses suggest that millions of dollars might be donated for ecosystem conservation – more than \$4 million for San Antonio Bay and nearly \$10 million for the Rio Grande Estuary.

"Valuation studies like these demonstrate how important Texas' natural resources and ecosystem services are to its citizens and why we must factor their worth into resource policy decisions," said Eric Biltonen, environmental economist at HARC.

The researchers also found that Texas residents who visited the San Antonio Bay region would be willing to spend about 18 percent more – \$273, as compared to actual travel costs of \$231 – to experience the bay's recreational and natural benefits.

"These studies can help policymakers and all stakeholders make resource-management decisions grounded on sound science," said David Yoskowitz, economist at the Harte Research Institute.

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