

James G. Teer Conservation Leadership Institute 2020-2022  
1-d-1 Wildlife Tax Valuation Team  
Final project report, December 2021  
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**Abstract**

The wildlife tax valuation (1-d-1W) in Texas allows landowners to receive a special valuation on their properties for conducting wildlife management, equivalent to the rate applied to traditional agriculture. The James G. Teer Conservation Leadership Institute (JGTCLI) has asked us to identify ways to strengthen the 1-d-1W process to better support its original purpose: to promote the stewardship of open spaces on private lands for the benefit of Texans and native wildlife. After learning more about the problem through background research, expert interviews, an anonymous survey, and steering committee meetings, we recommend an advocacy campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of 1-d-1W among key stakeholder groups and the general public. By clarifying the purpose of 1-d-1W, its financial implications, and its importance to Texas wildlife and open spaces, this campaign will ultimately promote stakeholder unity towards a common goal - the conservation of native wildlife and habitat. We recommend the Texas Wildlife Association lead the implementation of this advocacy campaign by using the products, strategies, and partners identified by the 1-d-1W cohort.

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**Background**

In 1995, Texas voters passed legislation which added wildlife management as a qualifying land use for agricultural tax appraisal. As a subchapter of open space agricultural appraisal (referred to as 1-d-1), which is in turn an alternative agricultural appraisal (referred to as 1-d). The

“wildlife tax valuation” (referred to as 1-d-1W) allows landowners to receive a special valuation on their properties for conducting wildlife management, equivalent to the rate applied to traditional agriculture. The law is unique to Texas and is critical to the conservation of native wildlife and natural resources, as it empowers landowners to practice this type of management while maintaining their special tax designation. Our team was challenged with the task of identifying focal areas of improvement to strengthen the 1-d-1W process.

## **Project development**

Since being tasked with this project in February 2020, our team started with building our foundational knowledge of 1-d-1W and its implementation in Texas. By conducting interviews with a wide spectrum of stakeholders and subject matter experts (e.g., landowners, public and private wildlife biologists, county appraisal districts, legal counsel, and many more), we gained insight into how 1-d-1W is perceived by these different groups and how effectively it fulfills its intended purpose. We used this information to draft a vision statement and begin identifying factors limiting the effectiveness of 1-d-1W as a tool for Texas wildlife conservation.

### *Our Vision*

“We envision a 1-d-1 Wildlife Tax Valuation process in which the requirements and benefits of the program are clear, consistent, and accessible to both tax appraisers and landowners seeking enrollment, which ultimately promotes the conservation of native wildlife on private lands in Texas.”

Our subject matter experts voiced several recurring criticisms of 1-d-1W, such as the inconsistency of county appraisal districts in their implementation of the law, the detailed documentation required by landowners annually for their 1-d-1W appraisal, and the prerequisite agricultural history. To help us better understand these hurdles, we solicited the help of a few of these experts as we worked through the Conservation Standards Training process to better define our project’s scope.

### *Conservation Standards Training*

Our project planning was guided in part by the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, or Conservation Standards (CS) training. This process allowed us to assess the problems associated with 1-d-1W and formulate potential solutions in terms of available evidence, expertise, and experience. Through the CS process, we defined and developed our project’s goal, objectives, and potential strategies to address barriers to 1-d-1W enrollment (Supplementary Material 1). After researching existing approaches and generating new avenues of thought, we selected the optimal strategies based on the evidence.

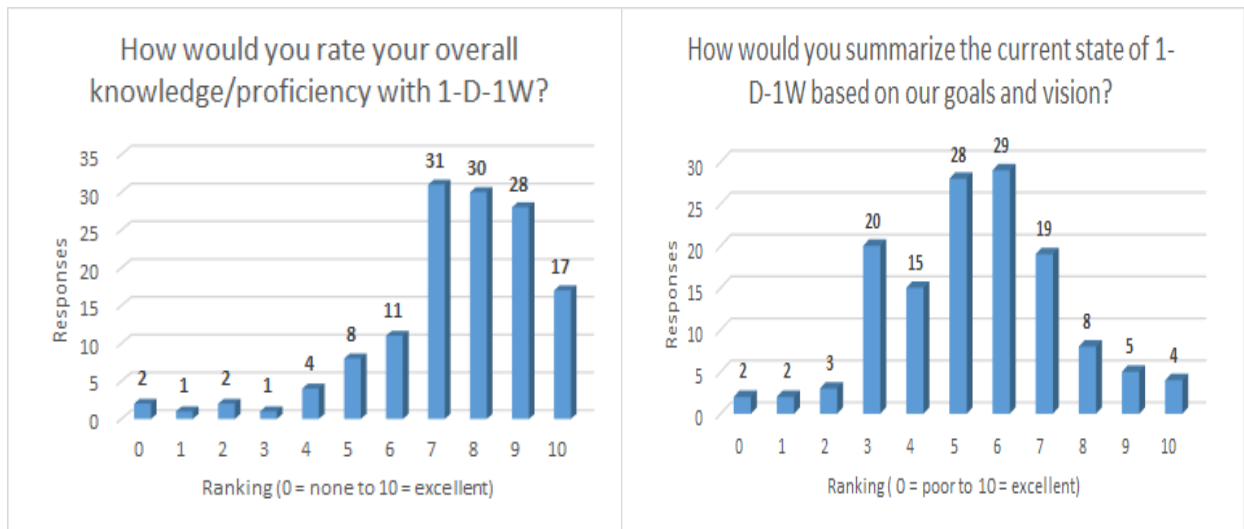
## *Survey*

To confirm some of our observations and receive expert advice, we decided to develop and send out a survey to key stakeholders. The optimal strategies were the basis for the online JGTCLI 1-d-1 Wildlife Tax Valuation Survey (Supplementary Material 2). In this three-part survey, we asked participants to rank the severity of barriers that limit the effectiveness of 1-d-1W, the potential impact and feasibility of strategies, and indicators for determining the success of our targets and vision.

Our survey was sent out to our compiled list of subject matter experts, TCTWS members, and Texas Master Naturalists (TMNs) with the request to forward accordingly within their respective networks. We screened our audience with a pre-qualifying email requesting “only those with personal experience with wildlife tax valuation” to complete the survey. In total we received 136 responses (Supplementary Material 3). Due to the survey being forwarded outside of the initial email, our total audience reached is unknown, however roughly 2,000 individuals were directly contacted by our group.

Respondents were asked to classify their affiliation with 1-d-1W based on 5 categories: Central Appraisal District, Land Owner, Natural Resource Employee, Consultant, and Other (includes NGO, TMN, Educator, non-profit, etc.). The majority of survey takers identified themselves in multiple categories with 53% identified as Land Owners. The lowest survey participation was from central appraisal district (CAD) employees at one submission.

The following two charts reflect the respondents knowledge level and opinion of the current state of 1-d-1W. Both chart scales on the x-axis represent a gradient of 0 – 10 or poor to excellent. In addition to the pre-qualifying email statement, we also included self-assessment within the survey. 78% responses ranked themselves as 7 or higher (good to excellent proficiency). This provided assurance that our respondents truly understand the topic (or at least think they do).



Feedback regarding the current state of 1-d-1W was variable displaying a fairly normal distribution. The majority of responses ranked the current state as fair to good with only 13% classifying as excellent. This indicates plenty of room to move the needle for improving the overall efficacy and impression of 1-d-1W in Texas. The most severe barriers identified were lack of communication between CADs and landowners and lack of desire from CADs to enroll properties. The most supported strategies included creating visual aids or other resources to simplify the process of enrollment, revising discrepancies in reference material, and supporting efforts of existing 1-d-1W advocates, all of which would improve communication and facilitate understanding of 1-d-1W.

Respondents could provide additional feedback in the comment option that followed each section. In reading the comments, it was clear that stakeholders are passionate about 1-d-1W in Texas and want to see it improved. However, there were concerns that within the current political climate, any attempts at legislative reform could put the 1-d-1W program at risk. We also observed a disconnect between the intended purpose of 1-d-1W and the way it is generally implemented and perceived. Landowners are primarily motivated by the desire to “alleviate the tax burden as much as possible” while CADs seem to suffer from a “lack of engagement” and “little agriculture or wildlife knowledge.” Wildlife conservation and land stewardship were not explicitly expressed as motivating factors for participation in 1-d-1W.

Therefore, we agreed our best approach to aiding all Texans in utilizing 1-d-1W would be to tackle education, engagement, and communication. Based on our survey results, the group’s independent research and interviews with relevant subject matter experts, we decided to move forward with outlining an advocacy campaign to develop and distribute educational materials on 1-d-1W for all stakeholders to foster a true appreciation for good stewardship of our natural lands.

## **Advocacy Campaign**

The advocacy campaign will support our vision by raising awareness of the benefits of 1-d-1W among key stakeholder groups. By clarifying the purpose of 1-d-1W, its financial implications, and its importance to Texas wildlife and open spaces, the campaign will reduce the most often-cited barriers preventing the program's success while ultimately promoting stakeholder unity towards the common goal - conservation of native wildlife and their habitats.

The first step in constructing our advocacy campaign was forming a steering committee including representatives from all key stakeholder groups. The committee is essential to ensuring that our campaign reaches its intended audiences and is effective in raising awareness and understanding of 1-d-1W. The roles of the steering committee are to 1) to provide input on what types of campaign materials and messaging will be most effective for their respective demographics and 2) to assist us in disseminating those materials once they are created.

After receiving approval from the TCTWS Executive Board in February, we assembled our steering committee of 14 members from the 3 primary stakeholder groups involved with 1-d-1W: Landowners, Tax Officials, and Wildlife Advocates. We laid the framework for four committee meetings occurring every two months from April through October of 2021. Each meeting focused on a different portion of the advocacy campaign while soliciting guidance and feedback from our steering committee members.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Kick-off Orientation (April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021)
  - General introductory session explaining the work up to this point, the vision for the advocacy campaign, and clarifying roles and responsibilities.
  - Results from this meeting include solidifying our steering committee and receiving valuable feedback on next steps.
  - Based on discussions during this meeting, we added an additional audience of “General Public” along with our 3 primary stakeholder groups: Landowners, Tax Officials, and Wildlife Advocates.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Branding/Messaging (June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021)
  - Answer the ‘What’ and ‘Why’ through interactive branding exercises to create a consistent identity and voice for the campaign. Quantify what the campaign is trying to accomplish and how it presents itself to the world (i.e., ‘Why does it matter?’).
  - This meeting resulted in a branding guide for the advocacy campaign (Supplementary Material 4).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Products (August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021)
  - Answer ‘How’ by determining which product types and outlets would be best suited for conveying information amongst stakeholders.

- This meeting resulted in a menu of products and strategies to be implemented in the future by the advocacy campaign (Supplementary Material 5).
- Additionally, we followed the branding guide and steering committee input to create the following priority products for distribution and immediate use
  - Online video production highlighting what 1-d-1W is, why it matters, and how to learn more (Link will be distributed when complete)
- 4<sup>th</sup> Outreach (October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021)
  - Identify ‘Who’ (e.g., individuals, organizations, and agencies) we should deliver our information to and develop strategic distribution avenues.
  - This meeting resulted in a contact list and network of partners (Supplementary Material 6) to implement the advocacy campaign and distribute products.

As summarized from the above, these steering committee meetings resulted in a branding guide for conducting a 1-d-1W advocacy campaign, materials and contacts to begin distribution, and recommendations for future products and strategies. All of these resources are contained in a supplementary materials folder and are ready to be distributed to the next leader of these efforts.

### **Future Recommendations**

The immediate next step for our project will be to present our work at the TCTWS annual meeting in February of 2022. There we will have an audience composed almost entirely of wildlife advocates, giving us a unique opportunity to issue a call to action to one of our key stakeholder groups. We want to convey through our presentation that the work we have accomplished will make it easier for them to communicate with others about the value and benefits of wildlife tax valuation. In addition, we are dedicated to providing tools uniquely designed for each stakeholder group that will empower wildlife advocates to become better ambassadors of 1-d-1W. This meeting is also where we will premiere our online video and call upon everyone in attendance to share it with at least 4 other people—one from each stakeholder group.

While we hope to make a significant impact at the TCTWS annual meeting, we know the campaign’s effectiveness will depend upon how it is carried forward into the future. An enormous amount of work has gone into clarifying this problem as well as identifying avenues and strategies for addressing it. Our group and steering committee members agree that our collective time and effort should not go to waste, and that this work must continue in some capacity to ensure that these strategies are implemented. There are two complicating factors, however. The first is that our group’s time with the Teer Institute—and with this project—will be coming to an end in February 2022; the second is that these project deliverables are the property of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society, meaning that if another organization wanted to carry this effort forward, it is not immediately clear how they would do so.

The recommendation of this cohort, along with guidance from our steering committee, is to work with Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) to continue the advocacy campaign effort. We would encourage the formation of an ad hoc committee within TCTWS to facilitate this transition. TCTWS and TWA leadership will need to meet, preferably as soon as possible after the TCTWS annual meeting, to clarify product ownership and rights of use, co-branding requirements, and other concerns identified by the ad hoc committee. Our group member Amanda Gobeli, who is an employee of TWA, can help initiate and direct these conversations.

If the transition is successful, next steps should include gathering partners to assist in outreach and implementation as well as designing a logo and title to better define the advocacy campaign. We then recommend developing priority products from the menu and calling upon partners (and their contacts) to help disseminate those products. While our focus has mostly been on a statewide effort, we encourage everyone involved to think outside state borders as well. 1-d-1W is a unique conservation tool that should be promoted nationally. Our hope is that the products and strategies identified to increase awareness of 1-d-1W in Texas could also be used to promote wildlife management as a unique tax appraisal for the conservation of wildlife habitats in other states.