

**ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT**

## H-E-B launches documentary series on Texas state parks and endangered animals

The series, 'Our Texas, Our Future,' includes five short films that will be released Aug. 23 on YouTube.



Scene from one of the shorts in HEB's 'Our Texas, Our Future' series on YouTube  
HEB/Fin and Fur Films/Texas Parks

By **Jef Rouner**, *Correspondent*

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The same place where H-E-B stores get their juicy steaks is also home to the largest population of ocelots left in the state of Texas. Preserving both dinner and these endangered cats is a great example of the philosophy behind the store brand's new series of short documentaries, debuting Aug. 23 on YouTube.

"We've focused on our Texas suppliers," says Leslie Sweet, managing director of sustainability and environmental affairs for H-E-B. "We love the pride that our customers feel learning about our suppliers, like the East Foundation. The more they know, the more opportunities we have to avoid extinction threats."

**ARE THESE TEXAS WATERPARKS THE BEST?:** Check out which waterparks in the state were named two of the best in the U.S.

"H-E-B Presents: An Our Texas, Our Future Film Series" is a collection of five short nature documentaries done in partnership with Fin and Fur Films and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. One hundred years ago, Gov. Pat Neff, son of the conservationist Isabella Neff, created the state park system. "Our Texas, Our Future" is part of the centennial celebration of the wide-open spaces that are now protected.



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“We’ve had so much more fun with the state park team than we ever could have imagined,” says Sweet. “Our customers want to hear more about the beauty of Texas.”

The first and shortest of the documentaries, “A Century Celebration,” chronicles the history of Texas state parks over incredible footage of bluebonnet fields, mountain climbers and fishing trips. It notes, somewhat ruefully, that the Texas Legislature only made funding for the park system permanent in 2019. Clearly, the fight to preserve the parks is ongoing.



Scene from one of the shorts in HEB's Our Texas, Our Future series of shorts on YouTube  
HEB Fin and Fur Films Texas Parks

The other four films focus on the animals of Texas. “Second Chance” is a riveting account of trapping the returning black bears in the southwest part of the state. Over the last 70 years, black bears have been driven almost completely out of Texas by human encroachment on their habitats. Thanks to conservation, they are slowly making their way back from the mountains of Mexico.

The film follows two scientists: Louis Harveson, associate provost of research and development and founder/director of the Borderlands Research Institute at Sul Ross State University; and Dana Karelus, the state mammal specialist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. They use bear traps that look like they were cobbled together out of old meat smokers in someone’s dad’s garage to capture 300-pound bears for tagging and study.

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Through their efforts, they’ve been able to teach communities how to live in harmony with the animals.



Dr. Sara Weaver in the short 'Batsies' from the HEB-sponsored film series 'Our Texas, Our Future'  
HEB/Fin and Fur Films/Texas Park

Bat fans get a special treat in “Batsies.” The title is a play on the term “besties,” which describes the two lead scientists. Sara Weaver (principal and natural resources director at Bowman Consulting) and Sarah Fritts (Texas State University) spend their nights collecting bats for study, though the short also highlights their time playing pool and hanging out.

“Our field has been largely male dominated for a long time,” says Weaver. Having another woman doing the same research is empowering. Young girls see that and think, ‘I can do that.’”

### **'H-E-B Presents: An Our Texas, Our Future Film Series'**

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**What:** A series of short films about nature and wildlife in Texas.

**When:** Begins streaming Aug. 23

Weaver has been specializing in protecting bats from wind farms for a decade. Unfortunately, the rapid growth of wind farms in Texas has led to an uptick in bat fatalities. The short follows the two women as they capture bats and test ultrasonic deterrents on them.

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“The frequency makes the space around the turbines very uncomfortable for bats,” she says. “They avoid it.”

The high-tech sound machines are not the only one way that Weaver has been working to help wind farms avoid hurting the bat populations. Another avenue of research has been curtailment. That’s when turbines aren’t allowed to freewheel during times of low wind speed when they wouldn’t be generating power anyway. Weaver has noticed that it’s during these low-speed periods when bat deaths spike. Research is also underway to fit turbines with bat detectors to stop them during times of increased activity.

“The industry has been a big supporter and has funded a lot of the research through the Renewable Energy Wildlife Research Fund,” says Weaver, who did her dissertation research on a Duke Energy wind farm in South Texas. The fund fuels research related to wildlife impacted by renewable energy sources.

Throughout the series, there is a theme of industry and conservation working together. The East Foundation ranches, where H-E-B gets some of its beef,

are helping maintain the few remaining wild ocelots in Texas. The large cats have “least concerned” status worldwide, thanks to efforts in Central and South America, but their habitat in Texas is almost completely gone. Maintaining wild spaces in conjunction with private ranching has been instrumental in keeping ocelots in Texas.

There is also a look at the redfish population, including gorgeous underwater photography. “Redfish Revival” is perhaps the most Texas of the stories, in that it involves outlaws and adventure. The redfish population was decimated in the 1970s and '80s as they became dining staples. Fishermen told to stop catching the fish ended up in nighttime battles with the Coast Guard. Redfish once would turn storm surges orange they were so plentiful, but by the new century they were on the way out.

The documentary takes viewers inside the hatching operations that have helped repopulate the wild areas while also keeping the seafood aisle stocked. The message in “Our Texas, Our Future” is clearly that business and conservation can protect nature.

This is not a new orthodoxy for H-E-B. For years, the San Antonio-based company has funded sustainability programs, and “Our Texas, Our Future” is a rebranding of its previous efforts. Park rangers have been stationed in stores to answer questions, and the chain frequently shares the stories of its Texas-based suppliers.

For Sweet, born and bred in Texas, this project is just the latest incarnation of what H-E-B has always stood for.

“Our family didn’t have a lot of money for many years, so we camped and fished,” she says. “The great outdoors was our vacation spot. Our customers

need to be aware of how we can keep a healthy state park system for everyone to use.”

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