



## “Currents” March 2023

### **Get to Know the State Fish of Texas**

Since Texas Independence Day is celebrated this month, now is a good time to learn about a species that helps make our state special. Our state fish, the Guadalupe Bass, is native to the spring-fed rivers of central Texas and in the past decade has become a conservation success story.

Anglers who enjoy fishing in the Texas Hill Country are no doubt familiar with the tough fight that can be put up by these small fish. Guadalupe Bass rarely get larger than 3.5 pounds, which makes them perfectly suited for our shallow and fast streams. Guadalupe Bass are valuable indicator species since they prefer pristine stream habitats considered emblematic of the Texas Hill Country: clear streams skirting limestone bluffs and banks lined with Bald Cypress, Pecan, and Cottonwood trees. Healthy populations of Guadalupe Bass are a reflection of a healthy ecosystem.

Habitat degradation due to land use changes and altered stream flow jeopardize the health of this species, but a significant threat also came from the introduction of a competitor species. In the 1970s, Smallmouth Bass were stocked in Texas rivers to improve sport fishing. In an unexpected turn of events, the two species began to cross, creating hybrids that outcompeted the native Guadalupe Bass for habitat and food. In some areas, extensive hybridization with Smallmouth Bass eliminated all pure Guadalupe Bass.

To combat this loss of native populations, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) teamed up with UGRA and other partners for the Guadalupe Bass Restoration Initiative. This initiative involved stocking large numbers of pure Guadalupe Bass and making habitat improvements to nurture the incoming populations. Since 2007, TPWD has stocked thousands of fingerlings every year in Kerr County and over 2 million Guadalupe Bass have been stocked across the state. In some areas of Texas, TPWD was able to remove and relocate the remaining Smallmouth and hybrid bass populations. Large scale habitat restoration was also an important part of the initiative to ensure the reintroduced populations have a strong foothold. More than 123,000 acres of ranchland were involved in improving management practices to protect the health of their local waterbodies. These high restocking levels and habitat improvements have helped to strengthen the species and we hope to see large, healthy populations of Guadalupe Bass for countless years to come.

The Guadalupe Bass isn't the only species unique to Hill County streams. The Texas Map Turtle and the Guadalupe Fatmucket also exclusively live in our local creeks and river. While some species are more sensitive than others, all wildlife need clean water and abundant habitat to thrive. Everyone can play a part in protecting these species through watershed stewardship, visit our website at [www.ugra.org](http://www.ugra.org) to learn more about how you can improve the health of the Guadalupe River.

### **Let's Keep Our River Clean**

*Shelby Taber, Natural Resources Manager for UGRA, [staber@ugra.org](mailto:staber@ugra.org) or (830) 896-5445*