



BEST OF TEXAS (NATURALLY) 2012

**BIGGER IN TEXAS?
WHY, YES, EVERYTHING IS!
BETTER IN TEXAS?
OF COURSE!**

BY LOUIE BOND



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ASK TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE Department staffers what they love best about Texas and then sit down for a spell.

The one thing that unites biologists and educators, journalists and accountants across this agency is a love for the natural places that abound in this state. Our eyes start to sparkle when we talk about horned lizards, Palo Duro Canyon or kayak fishing. Love of nature and love of Texas — it's in our DNA.

Last year, we brought you a selection of Texas' natural favorites picked by our *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine staff. This year, we asked our colleagues across the agency for their picks. We hope you'll join in the conversation on Facebook and Twitter, and tell us about your favorite Texas animals, places, plants and activities.

While all the nominees are clearly winners in their own right, I'd like to share one special nomination that resonated for me. You see, like Inland Fisheries specialist Larry D. Hodge (a frequent contributor to the magazine), I can't decide on just one!

BEST ODE TO BEAUTY

Larry Hodge says: My favorite place in Texas? How about that bluff on our hunting lease overlooking the confluence of the Pecos and the Rio Grande, the perfect place to watch the sun set? Or the almost-mystical moss-draped parade of trees lining Government Ditch on Caddo Lake? Or a playa lake in the Panhandle at sunset with a thousand sandhill cranes spiraling down, calling across the ages? Or the dense thorn-scrub of a South Texas wildlife management area, its silence shredded by a raucous band of chachalacas? Or the Hill Country deer blind where I shot my best buck ever, a heavy 10-pointer who lingered just a second too long after I bumped the window getting my gun up? Or the sandbar at the mouth of San Francisco Canyon on the Rio Grande where sleep came swiftly after a hard day's paddling against the wind, while thunder rolled in the distance, reminding me that the canyon once flashed 80 feet deep here and drove the Rio Grande backward for half a day? Or any of a thousand other places in this state, where I have explored every corner (and most of the rounded-off places, too)? No, none of these. My favorite place in Texas is one I have not yet seen. And there will always be another.