



July 12, 2023

DEAR INTERESTED PARTIES OF VAL VERDE COUNTY, TEXAS:

Val Verde County in Texas has been considered a conservation “hotspot” for several decades due to its unfragmented habitats, extensive waterways, abundant wildlife, spectacular scenery, and conservation-minded landowners. The area provides a critical migratory corridor for monarch butterflies, several species of bats, hundreds of bird species, and an increasing number of black bears moving into Texas from Mexico. Non-migratory animals that inhabit the area comprise an intensely woven and complex ecosystem that is unrivaled. The Lower Pecos and Devils Rivers in Val Verde County are recognized as some of the most pristine and most biologically intact watersheds in the state. In short, Val Verde County consists of much of the state’s most beloved wilderness and represents an environmental treasure that must be preserved and protected for Texas and beyond.

Starting with the land protection of Independence Creek in the late 1980s and continuing with the purchase of the Dan Allen Hughes Unit of the Devils River State Natural Area in 2012, the Pecos River and Devils River watersheds have received some of the most intense public land protection efforts in Texas. In addition, private landowners in Val Verde County have voluntarily agreed to conservation easements on more than 140,000 acres, encompassing dozens of ranches that are intended to protect the diverse wildlife habitat, the complex ecosystem, the pure water quality, and striking viewsheds among other conservation values; this distinguishes Val Verde County as the second most conserved county in Texas.

An increasing number of people from major metropolitan areas are traveling to this wild part of the state to explore, to hunt, to fish, to camp, to photograph, to do research, and more, further incentivizing public and private efforts to conserve and protect the County’s land and water. Over the past several years, conservation efforts have been challenged by the growing demand for the development of renewable energy in Texas. Large industrial facilities in Val Verde County, such as wind turbine farms, with their significant ground and aerial footprints, can directly harm species like monarch butterflies, bats, and birds (e.g. Golden Eagles, Swainson’s Hawks, and Cassin’s Sparrows), increase erosion into creeks and spring systems, harm ecotourism, destroy viewsheds, and damage the wild nature of the ecosystem that predominately remains in large tracts today. As a result of these potential maladies, landowners will likely lose their incentive to continue the difficult work of maintaining and conserving heritage ranches for future generations.

Due to these important factors, the following conservation organizations are signing onto this letter to recognize the extreme importance of Val Verde County and its Devils and Pecos River watersheds to wildlife, flora, and people. There are models, such as the Respect Big Bend plan (managed through the Borderlands Research Institute) that use ecosystem related data along with input from community leaders, landowners, and energy industry representatives to determine the best placement and scale of energy infrastructure. We strongly implore that special care, inclusive collaboration, and environmental priorities be considered before any additional industrial facilities are developed that permanently impact this unique and precious place.

Sincerely,

