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Guillen Bill Ends Automatic Water Safety Budget Diversions

AUSTIN – State Representative Ryan Guillen's (D-Rural South Texas) H.B. 448 was signed by Governor Abbott on **May 29th, 2017**. The new law allows Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) more financial flexibility to address the ever-changing needs in managing the state's outdoor and natural resources.

"H.B. 448 will stabilize the funding to the game, fish, and water safety account to ensure Texans have safe access to activities like hunting and fishing, and that these can be enjoyed by future generations of Texans."

Prior to 2003, all revenue from motor boat registrations and boat titling fees was deposited to the Game, Fish and Water Safety Account (Fund 9). The Game, Fish, and Water Safety Account is a dedicated account used primarily for funding water safety enforcement, wildlife management, conservation, and research. In 2003, at a time when our state parks funding was truly in dire straits, the Legislature passed H.B. 2351, which modified the Parks and Wildlife Code to require that 15 percent of revenue generated from boat registration, manufacturer or dealer licensing, and boat/motor titling fees be deposited to the State Parks Account (Fund 64). Given that much of the boating activity occurs within state parks, the bill was intended to ensure the parks system received a portion of the associated revenue stream to meet increasing demand and address related costs.

Since passage of H.B. 2351, a total of \$36.8 M has been transferred to the State Parks Account (Fund 64). At the beginning of FY 2017, the Fund 64 balance was healthy; however, over the years, the unrestricted Fund 9 balance has eroded due to increases in appropriations and other cash transfers. Without the passage of H.B. 448, the Fund 9 balance was estimated to be roughly \$20,000 by the end of FY2019. Now that H.B. 448 is law, the fifteen percent account transfer is permissive, allowing the department to decide what percentage to transfer, up to fifteen percent.

"H.B. 448 ensures that TPWD has the flexibility to utilize their resources in the way that best manages and protects ours," Guillen remarked.

H.B. 448 will become effective on **September 1st, 2017**.

Ryan Guillen serves ten rural South Texas counties in the Texas House of Representatives, including Atascosa, Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Kenedy, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, and Willacy.

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