

We Will Not Be Tamed

Texas is defined by iconic landscapes, from Big Bend to the Pineywoods. It is the land that defines us as Texans, ten distinct ecoregions as diverse as its people. One of those regions is the Gulf Prairies and Marshes, a sprawling, natural place teeming with wildlife and ripe for outdoor adventure.

JT Van Zandt, a fly-fishing guide and son of the late singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt, talks about the beauty and protection of the region's wild treasures that are hiding in plain sight.

What draws you to the Texas coast?

When I first went down to Port Aransas I couldn't believe my eyes. It's so gorgeous. I walked out onto the flats, among the oyster shells, in little neoprene booties. It was a little perilous. That's Texas, right? Everything bites, burns, stings, or breaks your heart in this state. But everything that is harsh about it is in place to sustain and protect it from overuse. There's a beauty in that.

How would you describe the Gulf Prairies and Marshes to someone who's never been?

The water is crystal clear—it's like looking down into a fish bowl. It's not some muddy swamp without any bottom contour. It's a very fragile, very fertile resource that provides life to the rest of the bay. There's more to learn down there than a lifetime provides opportunities for.

When you get into the back areas off the main bay, and you're quiet and

patient, you see an immense amount of hermit crabs. You'll probably see a redfish or a mullet, some speckled trout, or black drum. Flounder flush out and create a plumage of sand and mud behind them. You can scoop your hand through the vegetation on the bottom and come up with handfuls of shrimp.

Imagine this sound of life's cauldron: the percolating of shrimp, the calls of birds, the sound of lapping water on mud shorelines, the angry sound of the Gulf of Mexico crashing onto the shoreline just over the dunes.

There's this beautiful way of thinking about the marsh. Essentially, it's

the birthplace of all the tiny forms of life that exist on the coast: Shoreline birds nest in that marsh. Crabs and shrimp do their hatching in that water. And as the tide comes in, it brings nutrients back from the rivers into all these little ponds and creeks. As the tide gets sucked out by the ocean, those flats deliver life back into the bay. It's an amazing exchange.

Is the region prone to threats?

In Texas, it's a double-edged sword. We have this vast, wild place along the Texas coast, but one bad apple with a lack of respect or a lack of understanding can literally

trample and destroy these habitats. We really need to ask ourselves some questions as we explore this marsh: What is sustainable? What is being harmed, and what practices will enable us to pass this resource on? We possess something that we might not even deserve. But since it's ours, let's find a way to heighten our understanding of this area and protect it with everything we've got, so we and future generations can enjoy it forever.

What is it about the Texan spirit that connects with this region?

There are no greater characters on

Earth than the folks you'll run into on the Texas coast. They are beautiful people shaped by the harshness of that shoreline. The Karankawas before us were spearing redfish out of canoes. And part of what protects the Texas coast is its toughness. There's an understanding of its richness that has to happen before the beauty sets in, because it's a tough place, and the people are part of that.

Ten-second tour guide pitch?

When you're the first one there to see the sunrise—that color, that type of light you get early in the day on the Texas coast—it's the prettiest

JT Van Zandt on the saltwater wetlands of Powderhorn Ranch in Calhoun County.



place on the planet. This is absolute paradise and we're sitting right on top of it.

Texans are some of the wildest, most rugged, independent and freedom-loving people on Earth. So is our land and life on it. Find out how you can join JT Van Zandt and others who are standing together, for the land that has given us so much.

WeWillNotBeTamed.org

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