

Keep Texas Wild

ONE STATE, MANY PLACES

Forests, deserts, rivers, mountains - Texas has it all!

» OH, GIVE ME A HOME...

WHEN YOU'RE STARING OUT THE CAR window and the scenery starts to change, you're probably entering a new region of Texas. Perhaps you can see the flat land buckle into rolling hills and the tall trees become grassland. Texas has deserts, forests, prairies, plains, mountains, swamps and sandy beaches. Each type of environment supports different kinds of plants and animals. Have you ever wondered where a prairie dog or a black bear calls home? Turn the page and find out!

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PINEYWOODS REGION

IT RAINS IN the Pineywoods region more than any other place in Texas. Here you'll find lots of pine trees and swamps. In the Big Thicket there are four kinds of carnivorous (meat eating) plants that trap and eat bugs: the pitcher plant, bladderwort, butterwort and sundew. Though rarely seen, one of Texas' most playful animals lives here — the North American river otter. River otters often make their own water parks, sliding down steep clay banks face first into the water. Splash!

PANHANDLE-PLAINS REGION

NOTICE HOW this area of Texas looks like the handle of a pan? That's why it's called the Panhandle! The Panhandle Plains region is covered with ranches and prairie grasses. It is mostly flat with two deep canyons that are like upside-down mountains. Prairie dogs live here in groups of tunnels called "prairie dog towns." They aren't really dogs, but they do make a barking noise when they talk to one another.

PRAIRIES & LAKES REGION

THE PRAIRIES AND LAKES region is dotted with lakes, farms and cities, but long ago it was prairies. Giant dinosaurs roamed here. Now nine-banded armadillos, porcupines and wood ducks are common species. Wood ducks, almost extinct 100 years ago, build their nests in a hole high in a tree. Babies are born with their eyes open and can find food on their own right away — they've been known to jump nearly 300 feet from their nests to the ground and land safely!

HILL COUNTRY REGION

HILLS, STREAMS, SPRINGS and caves are common in this region. There is a lot of wildlife, including white-tailed deer, ring-tailed cats and salamanders. Bracken Cave has the largest bat colony in the world. At certain times of the year, more than 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats live here and eat about 250 tons of insects every night. The Hill Country sits on top of the Edwards Plateau. Underneath it lies the Edward Aquifer, which contains underground lakes that supply most of this region's water.

GULF COAST REGION

THE GULF COAST region is the place to find sandy beaches, coastal plains and grass lands. It rains often here, and sources of water — the Gulf of Mexico, bays, marshes, estuaries and bayous — make this a perfect home for many birds and fish, as well as turtles, alligators and snakes. Did you know that alligators don't require as much food as we do? A large alligator may only eat once or twice a week in the summer months!

SOUTH TEXAS REGION

ALTHOUGH MOST of the South Texas region is very dry, the lower Rio Grande Valley is a subtropical environment. You can see migrating tropical birds from South America and even palm trees. This region has more animals per acre than anywhere else in the United States. The ocelot, a very rare and endangered animal, lives in the South Texas region. This nocturnal, spotted cat is only a little larger than a housecat. In 2005, there were about 50 to 100 ocelots left in Texas. The chachalaca bird, named for the noisy sound a flock makes, also calls this region home.

BIG BEND REGION

THE BIG BEND REGION, the only region of Texas where real mountains are found, gets the least rain of any other place in the state. It's part of the Chihuahuan Desert. Since water is so scarce here, most plants are able to go a long time without it, storing it in their leaves, stems or roots. Many plants have thorns or spines that keep them safe from thirsty animals. Mule deer, mountain lions and black bears live here. Did you know that black bears are mostly vegetarian? They like to eat fresh leaves, roots and berries, and only occasionally eat insects or small mammals.

ILLUSTRATION BY D. B. CAMPBELL



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD MATH

PART OF WHAT MAKES THE SEVEN REGIONS different from each other is the amount of precipitation they receive. Precipitation is moisture that comes from the sky, like rain, hail, sleet and snow.

- 1) Which region gets the most precipitation?
- 2) Which region gets the least precipitation?
- 3) About how much more precipitation does the Pineywoods region get than the Panhandle-Plains region?
- 4) About how much less precipitation does the Big Bend region get than the Gulf Coast region?

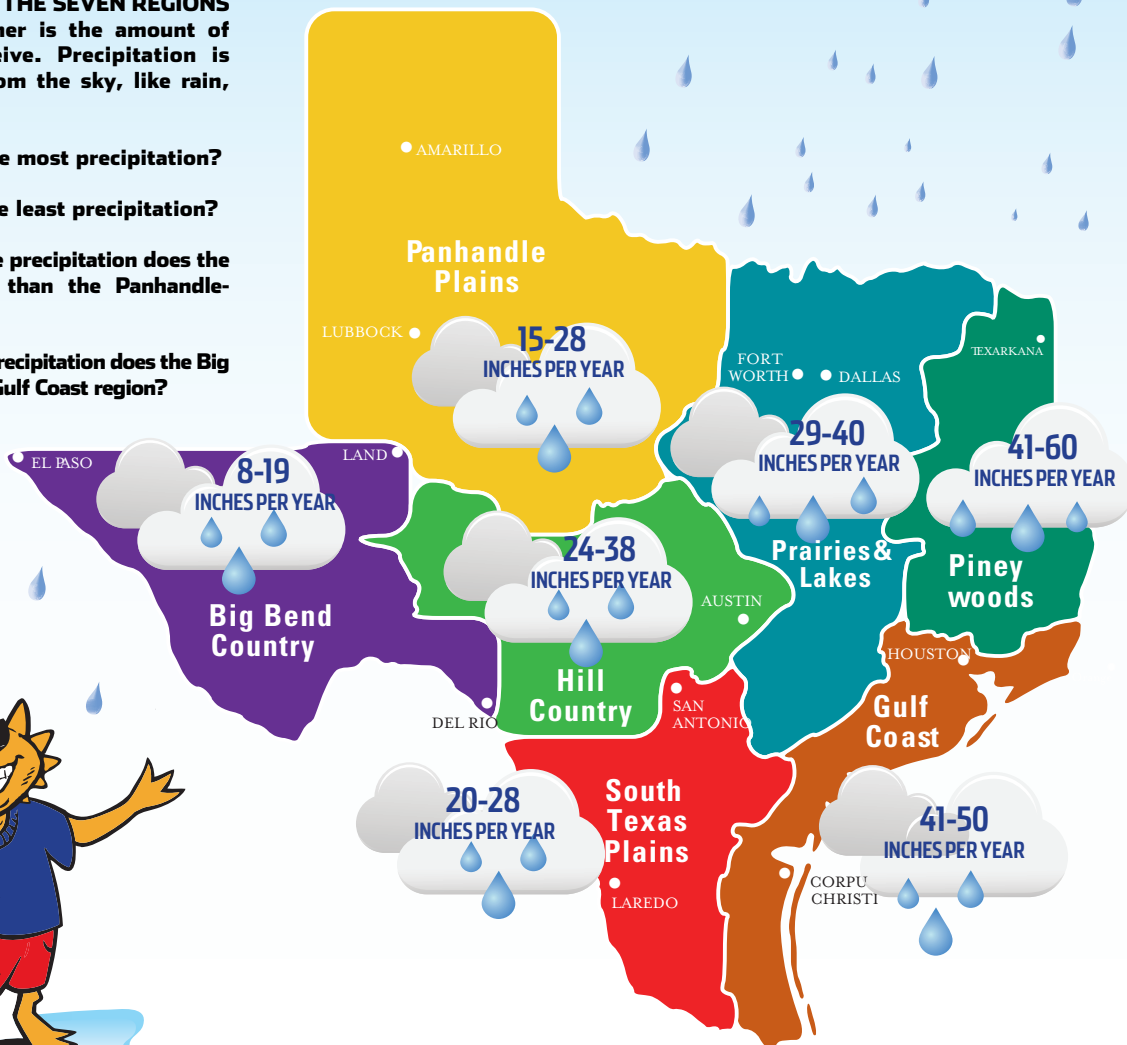


ILLUSTRATION BY AUGIE HAUND/TPWD

>> KEEPING IT WILD



DETERMINE what region you live in and what is special about it. How much precipitation do you get? What sorts of plants and animals live there? Are there any rare or endangered species in your region? Are there any state parks, landforms or special natural areas near where you live?

NEXT MONTH: Alien Invaders!



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