



TCEQ WELCOMES COMMISSIONER TOBY BAKER

Outdoor enthusiast brings a lifetime of environmental commitment to the job

Toby Baker's appreciation for the environment began as a boy, often visiting his mother's family ranch, or the land his father's side of the family owned, in Junction, on the south fork of the Llano River.

"I spent a lot of time there, with my two younger brothers, surrounded by the natural beauty of that land. It made a huge impression on me, and it was that upbringing which guided the professional path I have pursued to protect this state's environment.

"There is also a profound freedom that comes with having room to roam that leads to a sense of self-reliance. That freedom has also affected my view of government."

That early appreciation of nature, and later the desire to serve the public, is strongly rooted in his nurture—and the examples his parents set for him.

"I've never been shy about volunteering for things, especially things that have so much meaning to me—I get that from my father. At his core, he is a servant to everyone around him. Oftentimes I saw him sacrifice his own time, and even his own family's time, to care for people in need. He leads by example, and that has always made a huge impact on me—in both my professional and private life."

With the outdoors being his sanctuary, sports became a natural fit, allowing him ample opportunity to excel. A state



Photo courtesy of Stephen Stephanian

soccer-champion center midfielder at New Braunfels High School, Baker would also spend time on the football field as the team's kicker and a running back and inside linebacker. He also played summer baseball, pitching and playing all of the infield positions.

An avid marathoner since 2007, Baker has completed four races (his best time is 3:34:40). He enjoys hunting and fishing, but he hasn't ruled out possibly adding to his marathon medal collection.

"Whenever I get done with a marathon, I swear I won't do another. But then I start thinking about the next one."

He is currently setting his sights on the Marathon 2 Marathon race in far west Texas. The race starts on Highway 385, about 30 miles south of Fort Stockton, and ends 26.2 miles away, in the town of ... Marathon.

Baker and his wife Sloan (who is also a marathoner) are proud parents of 2-year-old Jake, and are expecting an addition to the family in September.

"I can tell you it's a boy, but I'm not going to reveal his name."

After his high school graduation, Baker originally wanted to parlay his love of the outdoors into a career in wildlife science.



Pecos Wilderness, New Mexico

Family photos



Family photos

From left: With son Jake, near Angel Fire and Eagle's Nest, New Mexico. 2012 Chevron Houston Marathon with wife Sloan (Comm. Baker finished the race in 3:49:26). South Fork of the Llano River. With wife Sloan and dog Micah, snowshoeing in the Wheeler Peak Wilderness, New Mexico.

“But I quickly realized that you needed a Ph.D. to get the cool jobs, like putting tracking devices on mountain lions. So I had to retool my degree plan.”

He was accepted to Texas A&M, where he was a member of the Corps of Cadets. He graduated with a degree in agriculture development, with a minor in parks and natural-resource management.

“Throughout school I became involved in working with youth and the outdoors. Again, it was one of those times of my life where I was able to recognize how the environment can have an impact on the lives of others.”

After college he accepted a job as a program director with The Boys and Girls Club of the Texas Hill Country in Fredericksburg, a nonprofit organization, which provides after school programs for youth. The opportunity was a learning experience—working with mostly disadvantaged children and organizing wilderness programs, which taught them how to appreciate the environment, gain self confidence and become self sufficient. His time there allowed him to evaluate how best he could serve the state, and its younger citizens, on a larger scale.

“While applying for grants at the Boys and Girls Club, we were getting beaten out for funds by larger cities. I thought, to best understand what needed to be done, I would pursue a career in public administration, so I could somehow effect change.”

But just a month after he began his graduate studies at the Texas A&M George Bush School of Government and Public Service, the September 11 attacks occurred.

“The focus immediately shifted after the attacks,” he said. “The relationship of government—how it interacts and communicates with not only the people it serves, but also how government agencies cooperate with each other for the greater good—that became the focus of what we learned.”

His graduate studies made him realize that a personal role in the public sector would allow him to have an effect on a larger scale.

“There is a legitimate role for government—but it’s equally important to be an authentic public servant,” he said. “For me, public service is a calling, not a job. You have to get into government for the right reasons.”

Baker would go on to serve the state as a director and clerk of the Texas Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs, and Coastal Resources. His public service resume would include a position with Sen. Craig Estes, as his policy adviser on natural resources. Most recently, he served as policy and budget adviser on energy, natural resources, and agriculture for the governor’s office, a role which allowed him to work with members of the legislature, constituents, and numerous state

offices—including the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

On March 23, Baker was appointed to the commission, replacing outgoing Commissioner Buddy Garcia.

“Toby Baker has a passion for the land and the environment. He is logical, thoughtful and takes a common sense approach to everything he does—and that’s what we need leading our government,” said former Governor Perry policy adviser, and former colleague, Wendy Lary. “Protecting our environment comes from within, and he has that enthusiasm and appreciation, for not only protecting our natural resources, but also finding a balance with how to utilize those resources, to better our state economically.”

Baker plans to utilize social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to connect with the agency’s stakeholders.

“Embracing these tools will allow us to get our message out to a much larger audience, helping us bridge the gap that often occurs between a regulatory agency and the public. It is my goal, as commissioner, to help build partnerships with all Texans, not create adversaries.

“A clean environment is good physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but one of the things I did learn on my family’s ranch is that the land can and should give back—by our using it for other purposes,” said Baker. “I think we can have a balance. I truly believe we can have both.” 🐾



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