Gov. Rick Perry: Texas Game Wardens are the Guardians of Our State's Resources

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Friday, May 16, 2008

Thank you Carter [Smith, TPWD Executive Director] and thank you for including me in this very special day for Texas Parks and Wildlife. I want to recognize and thank all the families of our cadets here today. These cadets could not have reached this moment without your support. Cadets, how 'bout a round of applause for your families?

I want to start by saying that it is a real pleasure to see all of you here who wear the blue badge. Now, I say that knowing that's not the reaction you're going to get when you find a guy with eight fresh deer heads in his shed, or an alligator in a tank in his living room, as some Texas game wardens have in the last few months. Sometimes, when you take a stand for what's right, you're going to find that people aren't always happy to see you. Even though you might make them jumpy even when they're not doing anything wrong, know that the people of Texas appreciate you.

They appreciate you because Texans are intensely proud of their state and its remarkable natural beauty. As such, they understand the role you play in keeping it safe and accessible for all. Each year, roughly six million people participate in fish and wildlife-related activities in Texas, including your Governor, making a total economic impact of more than $15 billion. My wife would probably tell you I personally spend that much on my own hunting and fishing gear, but that would be a slight exaggeration. But, besides me, there are millions of people in Texas who rely on you to keep it fair in the field and on the water and save them when nature gets a little out of hand.

I am confident that you are ready for the job ahead of you. You've heard the old saying, "save the best for last." And I am confident that you, the last class to complete the academy in the Austin facility, will prove that saying to be true. When you got to the academy seven months ago, you may not have known a merganser from a bufflehead, but you had something more important: a commitment to serving the people of our state. Given the quality of your training, the depth of your commitment and the support you enjoy from your families, I have every expectation that you will raise the bar for Game Wardens even higher in our state.

You represent what is probably the most tech-savvy class of Wardens in history and you'll need every last tool in your toolkit to succeed. Your grasp of technology will be a huge help when you find yourself matching wits with poachers who can communicate by cell phone to avoid you, mark hidden carcasses with GPS, or shock a boatload of fish to the surface with the flip of a switch. Fortunately, you can counter that with your own cutting edge technology including night vision equipment, DNA testing and even aviation assets.
However, the main advantages you have as you maintain order in the field are your instincts, your TPW training and, most of all, the other Wardens who proudly wear the blue badge. As you report to your new postings, I encourage you to take full advantage of the resources provided by this department and to rely closely on your fellow game wardens. Their experience, honed by months and years on the job, will be an essential benefit to you as you begin to serve the people of Texas. And that service won't be limited to checking for expired licenses, misapplied stamps or out-of-season game. In the past few years, as our state has poured more resources into defending our international border, Game Wardens have played an increasingly important role in fighting crime.

As part of Operation Border Star, there are Game Wardens who are using their skills and resources not only to enforce game laws, but also to monitor criminal activity on the border. Working alongside Border Patrol, the Texas Department of Public Safety, and local law enforcement, Game Wardens are fully integrated into our border security operations and making a big difference. In fact, roughly 50% of this graduating class is headed to the border region. We need you down there and we thank you in advance for preserving the integrity of our border.

Our Game Wardens also play a critical role in our state when nature shows its ugly side in the form of a hurricane or flood. With your skills in the woods and on the water, you are certain to continue the Game Warden tradition of rescuing people in trouble. And, sometimes, like anyone else who goes in harms way, Game Wardens need rescuing themselves. When you battle the forces of nature or confront people whose sport involves weapons, you take a calculated but necessary risk. And you do so because you are the sort of person who is willing to take a stand for what is right.

Know that we will continue to do everything in our power to watch your back while you defend the interests of our people. And we will continue to lift you up in prayer to our Creator as you defend His creation. Whatever challenges your new job presents, I am confident that your upbringing has prepared you, your training has refined you, and your personal integrity will guide you as you defend the people of our state. You entered this room as cadets, but will walk out bearing a title rich with honor, history and prestige. Today, you become Game Wardens, earning the respect and admiration of your families, your peers and your governor. So, today, I salute you, the guardians of Texas resources, and commend you for your willingness to preserve, protect and defend the constitution of our nation and our state.

May God bless you and your families and, through you, may He continue to bless the great State of Texas. See you in the field.