Trinity Basin Conservation Event

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

**Wednesday, June 18, 2008**

Thank you, Dr. McFarlane, [Founding Member, Trinity Basin Conservation Foundation] for that introduction and for working so hard on behalf of a remarkable feature of the Texas landscape.

I speak to a lot of groups in the course of a week, but I have to say I truly feel at home here in the company of people who love Texas and her natural beauty the way I do. It’s great to spend time with stewards of the land like the Agrilife Extension Service and the Trinity Basin Conservation Foundation, defenders of wildlife habitat like the Audubon Society and the Texas Wildlife Association, and the folks watching the big picture at Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas A&M. You are my kind of people. The kind who don’t complain about challenges, but simply roll up your sleeves and invest your time, your resources and your brainpower in solutions.

The preservation and allocation of natural resources are key challenges facing our state. With a population of more than 23 million that is growing at a rate of more than 1,000 people per day, there is a steadily increasing strain on the system. Some people might complain about those numbers, but I see them as rich with opportunity. Those new Texans are being drawn here, or born here, with the promise of the chance to pursue their dreams, because Texas is a land of opportunity. That opportunity takes the forms of jobs, which we’ve been creating at a rapid clip. Over the past five years, our state has added 1.2 million net new jobs. Over the past year, more than half of the jobs created in the ENTIRE United States were in Texas. CEOs have consistently identified our state as the best place to run a business, which may explain why we are currently home to more Fortune 500 corporate headquarters than any other state.

Now, you might ask yourself why I’m rattling off all these economic statistics, but I do it for a reason. Our state is going to continue to grow because of the positive economic climate we’ve worked to create. And, as we add jobs and more people come here to fill them and pursue their dreams of prosperity, stress on our infrastructure will increase. That means our roads, our waterways, our power distribution system, and our parks will all be accommodating more people. If we are not wise stewards of these resources, we’ll have only ourselves to blame if something breaks or some resource runs out.

That’s why we undertake efforts like the Trinity River Environmental Restoration Project. By leveraging federal dollars to restore the Trinity River Basin and its surrounding areas, we can preserve an essential part of the Texas landscape, preserving it for generations to come. It used to be that rivers were pretty much good for transportation, as a source of water and cause of the occasional flood. So we dammed them up, drained them for irrigation and
used them as a way to discard waste. Time, experience and a whole lot of scientific study have taught us that rivers are much, much more than that.

We now understand that rivers play an essential role in our environment and our interlinked ecosystems. These rivers deserve our best efforts to protect them. The Trinity certainly deserves that protection. To a lot of Texans, the Trinity was known as that muddy line you crossed over when you headed southbound out of Dallas. But it is actually a wonderful ecosystem that stretches from the Red River all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, passing through some of our biggest cities and prettiest country. It’s a whole lot cleaner than it used to be, thanks to the development of modern wastewater treatment plants in Dallas and Fort Worth. And the landowners all along its course have been working hard with state agencies, non-profit groups and their neighbors to ensure they are taking the best possible care of this waterway. Today it provides recreation to a variety of outdoor enthusiasts and supports an abundance of wildlife. My personal favorite is the alligator gar, a species I hope will experience a rebound.

The river basin also supports a whole lot of people- more than 9 million Texans rely on the Trinity for their water supply needs. So we need to keep on working to protect and renew it. We’re making good progress: funds from a variety of sources have been coming into the Trinity River project and will be put to good use on a number of environmental improvement projects. And public-private partnerships have been breaking new ground in protecting this vital part of our state’s watershed. However, it’s time to take this effort to the next level by getting an executive director in place. You all know the difference that makes in your organizations.

An empowered, equipped leader with a clear vision is the sort of thing that moves an organization from good to great. I believe that unified, visionary leadership will accelerate our progress on projects like the water quality studies, development of a watershed management plan, and the ongoing Wetland Reserve Program. An executive director could coordinate even better with the major cities along the Trinity, working with Arlington, Fort Worth and Dallas on their projects like flood management, ecosystem restoration and enhancing recreational uses.

All the projects aside, we all need to remember that we, as Texans, are stewards of a great resource. Only one other state has a longer river contained within its borders. The Trinity River is a part of our history and a vital source of life all along its length. I hope you will join me in celebrating the progress-to-date on restoring the Trinity and pledge your enthusiastic, ongoing support to the effort. Together, we can make a difference in the quality of life all along the basin, improve the cleanliness of the water, and preserve this life-giving artery of our state for generations to come. Preservation is a noble task undertaken by noble people and I thank you for getting involved. I look forward to getting that Executive Director in place and really restoring this unique waterway.

Thank you for your time. May God bless you and, through you, may He continue to bless the great state of Texas and all her natural beauties.