

**HOUSTON COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT  
WILDLIFE EXEMPTION GUIDELINES**

**Three tests must be passed:**

**1. Land must have qualified and been granted open-space agricultural or timber exemption the previous year.**

- a. Land used for wildlife only in previous year will not qualify
- b. Only qualified timber or qualifying ag-use land passes the test

**2. Activities test:**

- a. Habitat Control – means actively using the land to create or promote an environment that is beneficial to wildlife on the land.
  - 1. Brush control – control burning
  - 2. Planting food and ground cover
- b. Erosion Control – any active practice that attempts to reduce or keep soil erosion to a minimum for the wild animals' benefit.
  - 1. Growing winter cover crop for windbreaks
  - 2. Using plowing practices that minimize soil loss
  - 3. Developing farm ponds or sodded drains
- c. Predator Control – means engaging in practices intended to reduce the population of predators to a level that will not threaten the owner's target wildlife population.
  - 1. Trapping or shooting
- d. Providing supplemental supplies of water – when the owner actively provides water above the natural resources.
  - 1. Stock tanks
  - 2. Damming waterbeds to make ponds
  - 3. Seasonal waterfowl roosts and feeding ponds
  - 4. Windmills or watering systems
- e. Providing supplemental supplies of food – means supplying supplemental food by producing food above the level naturally produced on the land.
  - 1. Cool or warm season food patches or seed producing plants
  - 2. Continuously providing pellets or seed mixtures during critical parts of the season
  - 3. Providing salt or mineral blocks in deficit areas

- f. Providing shelter – means actively creating or maintaining wildlife shelters to give the wildlife screen to give the wildlife a screen to avoid contact with predators when feeding, “escape cover” to hide from enemies and shelter from the weather.
    - 1. Creating tree shelter belts for cover or shelter when there are not trees or shrubs
    - 2. Overhead cover by half-cutting brush
    - 3. Building loose brush or woodpile shelters
  - g. Making census counts to determine population – means surveys and inventories taken regularly to determine the number, composition or other information about the wildlife population.
    - 1. Aerial counts
    - 2. Checking stations
- 3. Population test – land must be used to generate a sustaining breeding population of indigenous wild animals.**
- a. Indigenous wild animal is a native animal – one that originated in and is living actively in an area, as opposed to an exotic animal or one that has been introduced to the area.
  - b. Sustaining breeding population – a group of animals large enough to live and grow as an independent unit. (Produces as many animals as it loses so the population will not die out.)
  - c. Land must actually generate a breeding population to meet the population test.
  - d. Land on which indigenous wild animals exist, but not in a number great enough to equal a sustaining breeding population, does not meet the population test.
- 4. Harvestable surplus test – owner must use the land to produce a harvestable surplus of indigenous wild animals.**
- a. Harvestable surplus means the number of species that may be harvested from the population without destroying the population’s ability to continue to sustain itself as a breeding population.
  - b. Land is not in agricultural use unless it actually produces a harvestable surplus.
- 5. Use test – population must be produced for human use**
- a. “Use” means to consume or take regularly

- b. Test requires that the animals be produced for human use, including food, medicine or recreation.
- c. Harvestable surplus must be produced with the intent of putting it to some consumptive use, such as hunting or trapping for food.
- d. Land on which the animals are not intended to be used or consumed does not meet the use test.

## 6. Principal Use

- 1. Land must be principally used for wildlife management to qualify.
- 2. Land used principally for harvesting or hunting native wild animals will not qualify.
  - a. Hunting for food or recreation may be an element of wildlife management, it cannot be the primary use of the land.

## 7. Management Questions

- 1. Is the owner implementing an active, written wildlife management plan that shows the activities necessary to preserve the sustaining breeding population on the land?
- 2. Do the management practices emphasize preserving the population over the recreational or other use of the land? For example, does the owner refrain from harvesting the animals in years when the sustaining population is threatened?
- 3. Do the management practices emphasize sustaining the population and encourage growth of the population?
  - a. Controlling predators
  - b. Supplying additional water
  - c. Supplying shelter and food in the fall and winter seasons
  - d. Control erosion during rainy seasons merely to sustain and encourage the animals' growth
  - e. In some cases, very little active management is necessary to maintain and encourage growth.
  - f. Improvements to the land – appropriate fencing for example-necessary to control or encourage the herd's growth.
  - g. Census counts to determine population

**8. Setting degree of intensity standards**

1. Degree of intensity for wildlife land usually requires management of the land that encourages long-term maintenance of the breeding population.
2. Questions should be asked concerning:
  - a. Whether fencing is typical in the area
  - b. What the typical method of harvesting is
  - c. What is the typical breeding population size
3. How many of the following activities are typical in the area?
  - a. Habitat, predator or erosion control
  - b. Providing supplemental supplies of water or food
  - c. Providing shelter
  - d. Engaging in census counts

**9. Management Plan**

1. A written management plan is required with the application. It can be a self-written plan with all pertinent information or may be one written by a forester or Texas Parks and Wildlife.