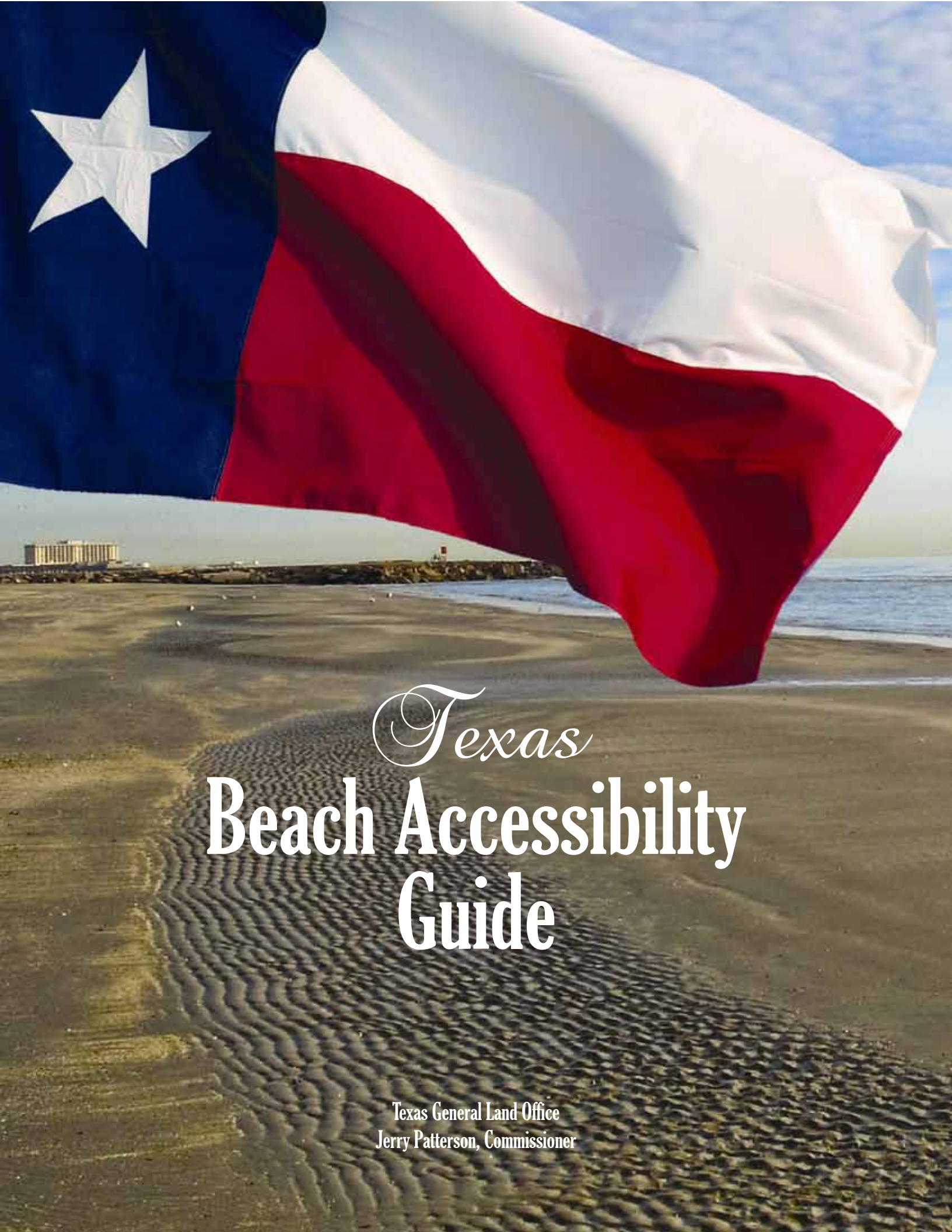

Texas Beach Accessibility Guide

Texas General Land Office
Jerry Patterson, Commissioner

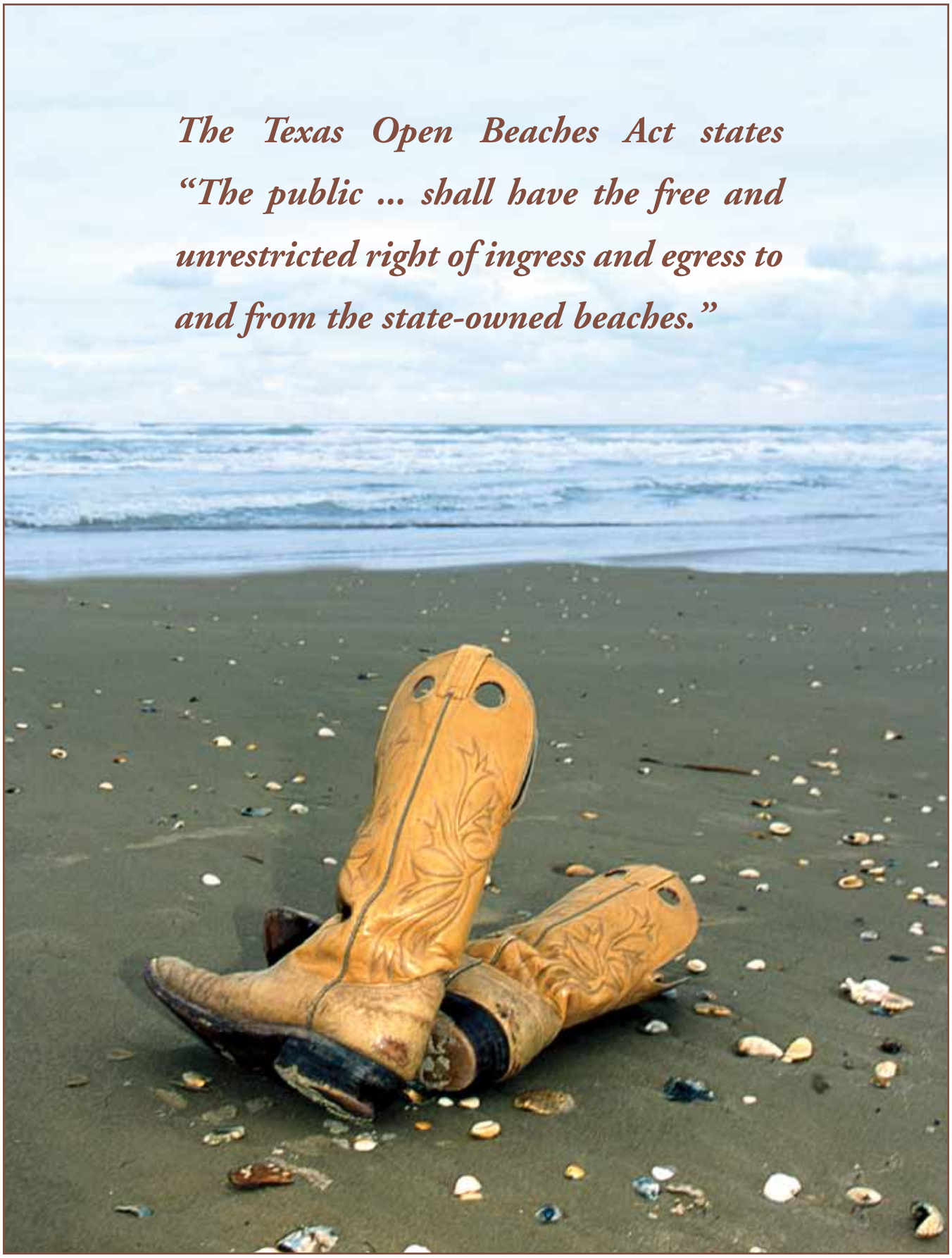

Photo and cover photo courtesy of Vadim Troshkin, Galveston.com

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Acronyms

United States Department of Justice (DOJ)

United States Access Board (Board)

Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR)

Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS)

Texas General Land Office (GLO)

Introduction

The public has historically used the beaches along the Texas coast for numerous recreational activities ranging from swimming to beach combing. In recent years, increasing coastal construction and decreasing beach widths have prompted local governments to restrict vehicles from public beaches particularly in areas with concentrated urban development. Although intended to prevent health and safety hazards, these restrictions often hinder beach access for persons with disabilities.

Local governments are required to assess designated beach access points within their jurisdictions to evaluate beach accessibility for persons with disabilities. Local governments must also address any compliance issues identified and work toward providing persons with disabilities access to the beach to the greatest extent possible. Beach access for persons with disabilities must be provided at all new or altered beach access points, whether the access point is adjacent to a vehicular or to a pedestrian-only beach. Regular maintenance and general repairs are not considered new construction or an alteration and therefore are not subject to this requirement.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for local governments adopting and implementing beach accessibility measures for persons with disabilities. This document has been developed in consultation with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR). Standards and specifications contained herein are based on the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS), and the U.S. Access Board's draft final Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas. In implementing these measures, local governments must coordinate with the Texas General Land Office (GLO) and TDLR, as applicable.

OPEN

Types of Vehicular Beach Access

Unrestricted Vehicular Access

The beaches along the Texas Gulf Coast were historically used as public roadways. Today, this tradition is still recognized in many areas where vehicles are permitted to park and drive without restrictions on the public beach throughout the year. Vehicular access is considered a primary means of access to most Texas beaches for all persons and is recognized as an acceptable option for providing access for people with disabilities.

Restricted Vehicular Access

In areas where vehicular traffic may pose a risk to public health and safety due to concentrated urban development or narrow beach widths, local governments may impose vehicular controls to restrict or limit motor vehicles along the public beach. Local governments may prohibit vehicles from parking or driving on the entire beachfront or restrict vehicular traffic from accessing a portion of the beach. Vehicular restrictions may be implemented year round or on a seasonal or temporary basis. The local governments must ensure that public beach ingress/egress access ways and temporary parking provided for special events are accessible to persons with disabilities in accordance with the applicable guidelines.

Local governments may only impose vehicular restrictions if the public's right to use and have access to and from the beach is preserved or enhanced. Beach access is presumed to be preserved if parking on or adjacent to the beach accom-

modates one car for every 15 linear feet of beach closed to vehicular traffic and conspicuous signage showing the nature and extent of vehicular controls, parking areas, and access points is posted. In areas where vehicles are prohibited from driving on and along the beach, ingress and egress access ways must be located no farther than ½ mile apart in accordance with the presumptive criteria provided in the GLO's Beach/Dune Rules.

Pedestrian Safe Areas

Local governments may restrict vehicular traffic from a portion of the beach by designating pedestrian safe areas that run parallel to the shoreline. Bollards or other acceptable traffic barriers may be used to delineate a pedestrian-only area where motor vehicles are prohibited. Landward of the barrier, vehicles are permitted to drive and park on the beach. Accessible parking areas and ingress/egress access routes should be provided at intervals no greater than 2 miles apart and must be constructed in accordance with TAS, as applicable.

Pedestrian-only Beaches

On pedestrian-only beaches, motor vehicles are prohibited from driving or parking on any portion of the public beach. To compensate for vehicular restrictions, public access may be provided from designated off-beach parking areas located directly adjacent to the beach or from on-beach parking areas. At pedestrian-only beaches, accessible routes must be provided at intervals no greater than ½ mile apart to ensure persons with disabilities are afforded equal access to the beach.

Photo courtesy of Vadim Troshkin, Galveston.com

Public Pedestrian Beach Access Routes

The beaches along the Texas coastline are diverse in nature and highly dynamic. Local governments should consider all varieties of access routes before deciding which will provide the most practical and reliable access—including access for persons with disabilities. Accessible public beach access routes may include permanent pathways such as dune walkovers and fixed footpaths or temporary pathways such as removable mats. When determining which type of beach access route best suits the conditions of the surrounding beach environment, local governments should consider the beach elevation and slope, seasonal tide fluctuations, the dune system, natural dune vegetation, natural habitats, shoreline change rates, wave action, and vehicular restrictions. Local governments must balance the protection and needs of the natural beach environment while providing access to as many people as possible.

Dune Walkovers

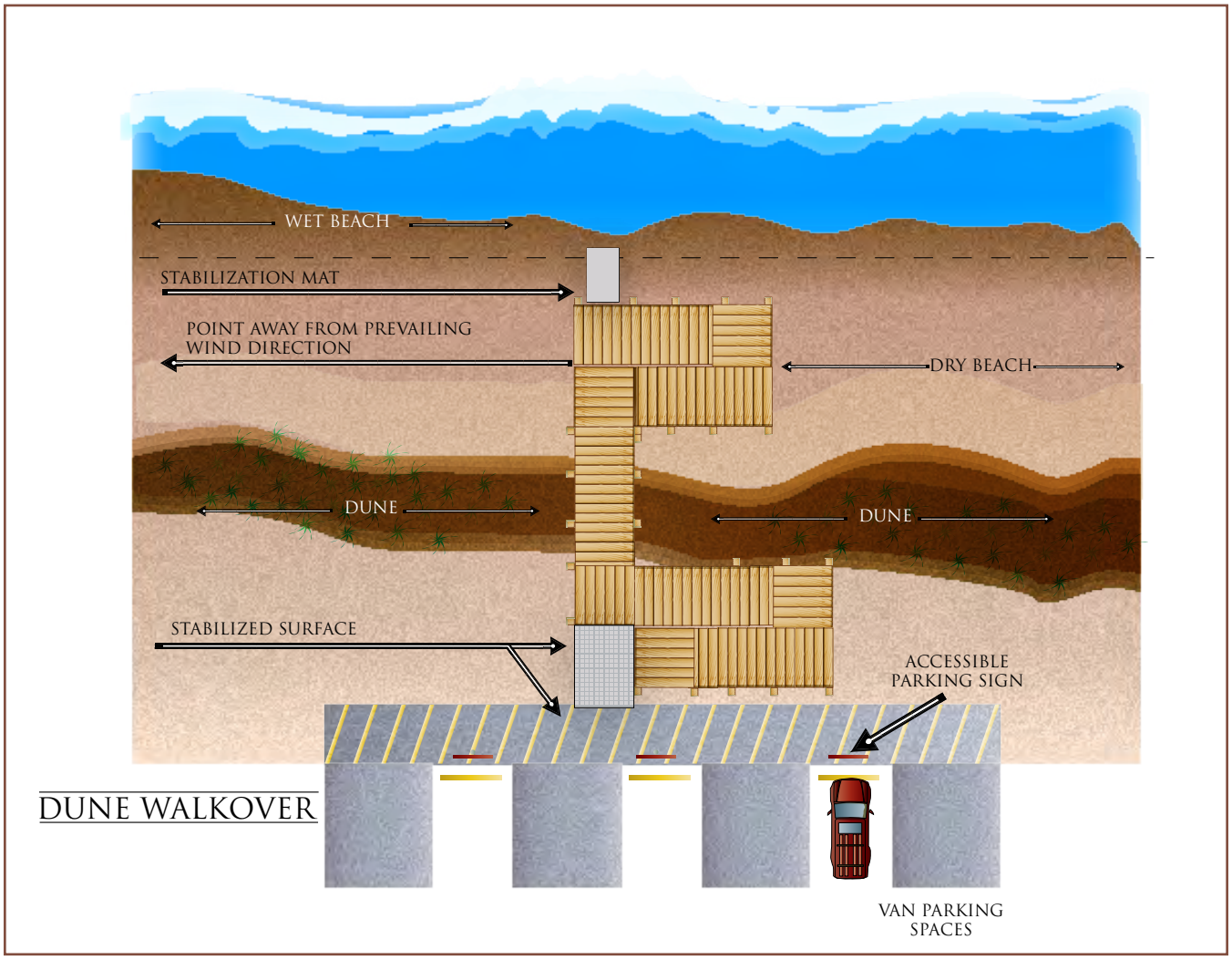
Dunes are a natural defense system for the coastline and provide sand replenishment to beaches following storm events. Damage to dunes and vegetation that stabilizes dunes can have devastating effects on the beach environment and adjacent inland properties and should be avoided or minimized to the greatest extent possible. Dune walkovers are commonly built to provide public access from adjacent off-beach parking areas to beaches in areas where dunes and dune vegetation can be damaged or destroyed by the construction of footpaths.

Dune walkovers must be constructed in accordance with this guidance document, the Beach/Dune Rules and the GLO's Dune Protection Manual. The local dune protection and beach access plan must comply with TAS. Walkovers should commence landward of the back dunes and

extend onto the beach beyond the foredune ridge and coppice mounds. Additionally, walkovers must maintain accessibility and minimize dune damage without creating hazards and obstructions on the public beach. The seaward terminus of a dune walkover should be located far enough landward to prevent regular destruction from wave action and accommodate projected shoreline changes.

Walkovers may provide access to compacted portions of the beach provided that public use of the beach and vehicular access for emergency and maintenance vehicles is not restricted. Beach users and vehicles should not be forced to enter the water during normal high tides. If a walkover cannot extend far enough seaward to provide access for persons with disabilities, temporary beach stabilization mats or other approved means of beach surface stabilization may accommodate access from the terminus of the walkover to compacted portions of the beach.

The deck of a dune walkover should be constructed at a height above the dunes, including adjacent dunes, equal to the width of the walkover, or at a three-foot minimum height above the dunes to allow rain and sunlight to reach underlying dune vegetation and to accommodate dune migration or any increase in dune height. If a walkover is not constructed at an adequate height over the dunes, sand may accumulate on the deck and hinder access.



Walkovers must be constructed in accordance with TAS, and any other locally adopted building code (such as the International Building Code) to provide for public safety.

To prevent mobility complications and minimize damage to dunes and dune vegetation, the slats that form the deck of a walkover must run perpendicular to the direction of travel and must be spaced ½ inch apart. With the exception of paired posts constructed on each side of the walkover, the support posts should be placed at intervals no closer than six feet. Support posts should be implanted at least five feet in the ground (or in accordance with structural good practice based on geotechnical conditions) to ensure stability and to allow for erosion during storm events. The support posts should be installed with a hand auger, posthole digger, or other approved means to minimize impacts to the dunes and dune vegetation. Concrete or other similar fills should not be used to stabilize support posts.

Dune walkovers must be constructed to provide a smooth transition from the seaward and landward termini to adjoining surfaces. Walkovers with running slopes that exceed 1:20 must comply with the portions of TAS that are applicable to ramps. To prevent sand accumulating and hindering access, the seaward terminus of a walkover should be oriented at an angle away from the prevailing wind direction.

Footpaths

Pedestrian footpaths, permanent or temporary, may be constructed to provide stabilized access from off-beach parking areas to the beach. Footpaths should provide a firm and stable surface that will maintain stability through regular use and normal weather conditions. To avoid impacts to critical habitats and dunes, footpaths should be routed through washover areas where possible. If impacts

to critical habitats or dunes are unavoidable, local governments should consider constructing dune walkovers.

Fixed Footpaths

Local governments may construct fixed footpaths landward of the line of vegetation to provide access to the beach. Fixed footpaths that are part of an accessible route are considered permanent structures and must be stable, firm and slip-resistant. Level changes (if any occur along an accessible footpath) must also be addressed in accordance with TAS. Although concrete and hard surfaces are generally used to stabilize compliant footpaths, these materials may not be suitable for beach routes seaward of the dune protection line. Local governments may consider alternatives such as fibercrete or brick pavers to stabilize fixed footpaths.

Temporary Footpaths

Providing pedestrian access to the beach for persons with disabilities requires surfaces that are stable, firm and slip resistant. Removable mats or an approved alternative method of surface stabilization that accommodates the required access may be acceptable. The mats may be preferable in areas with high erosion rates or where a stabilized surface is needed to provide access to compacted portions of the beach. Because maintenance and emergency vehicles may traverse the beach, mats should be durable and able to withstand occasional vehicular crossing. To prevent damage, local governments should remove mats prior to conducting beach maintenance and before high tide or storm events. Mats should be regularly maintained to prevent sand accumulation that may hinder access. If local governments choose to utilize alternative methods of surface stabilization for temporary footpaths, consideration should be given to acceptability, ease of use, durability and maintenance. All alternative methods of surface stabilization must be approved by the

GLO and comply with TAS and Board guidelines.

Technical Standards for Footpaths

Clear Widths, Passing Space & Surface Openings

When considering the appropriate width to construct a beach access route, local governments should estimate the amount of traffic the pathway will generate. A minimum clear width of 36 inches accommodates one-way passage for a single wheelchair. If the natural conditions of the site do not allow for a 36-inch clearance, the width of a route may be reduced to 32 inches for a distance no greater than 2 feet. A clear width of 60 inches accommodates two-way passage and is highly recommended for public beach access routes. If the width of a beach route is less than 60 inches, a 60-inch by 60-inch passing space should be provided every 200 feet. Openings along the surfaces of footpaths must run perpendicular to the direction of travel and shall not exceed ½ inch in width.

Running Slopes, Resting Intervals, & Cross Slopes

To enable persons with disabilities access along a beach access route, running slopes must be designed to meet the minimum accessibility standards. Resting intervals should be at least 60 inches long and at least as wide as the public beach access way. The cross slope of public beach access ways shall not exceed 2 percent.

For temporary footpaths, running slopes that exceed 3 percent should provide level landings/resting intervals that allow individuals the opportunity to break before continuing along an inclined access route. Level landings/resting intervals must be provided at least every 50 feet for running slopes up to 1:12 (8.33 percent) and at least every 30 feet for running slopes up to 1:10 (10 percent).

For fixed footpaths, running slopes that exceed 5 percent shall provide level landings/resting intervals. Level landings/resting intervals must be provided every 30 feet for running slopes up to 1:12 (8.33 percent) which is the maximum running slope for fixed footpaths.

Edge Protection

If the drop-off from a pedestrian footpath is 6 inches or higher, edge protection must be provided as a safety precaution. Handrails, rocks, and wood may be used as edge protection. Local governments should consider the type of pathway, the location of the pathway, and the conditions of the area when determining which material is most suitable. For beach access routes with drop-offs greater than 1 inch but less than 6 inches, the vertical edge of the drop-off must be beveled with a slope of 1:2. Edge protection for beach access routes should be constructed to minimize interference with natural sand distribution and prevent sand accumulation.

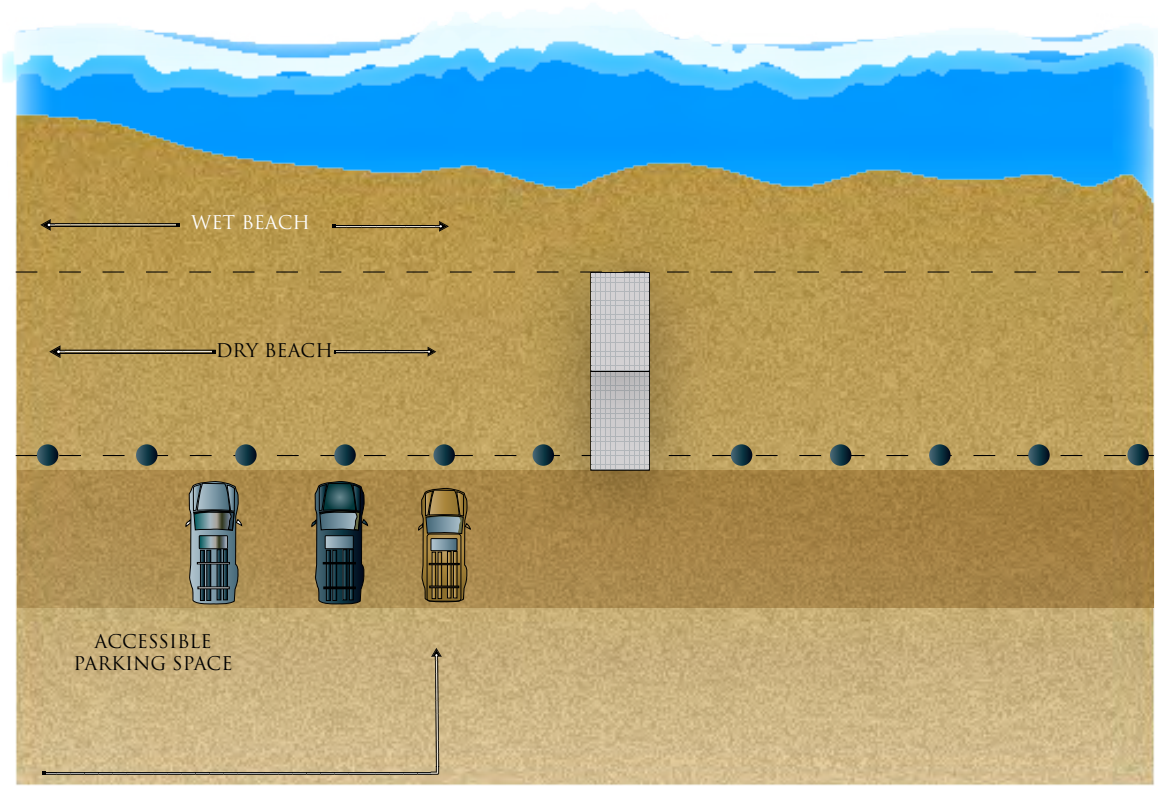
Obstructions

Local governments should regularly inspect accessible beach routes to remove any obstructions that restrict access. Obstructions include objects that extend into the clear width of the route or objects along the pathway greater than 1/2 inch in height. Beach access routes shall provide a vertical clearance of at least 80 inches and be designed to prevent water accumulation along the pathway.

On-beach Parking

Local governments may compensate for restrictive vehicular controls by providing on-beach parking adjacent to pedestrian-only beaches. Within on-beach parking areas, vehicles are permitted to park and drive on the beach. The public may gain access to adjacent vehicular-restricted beaches on foot. Typically, bollards that run perpendicular to the shoreline delineate on-beach parking areas. To ensure accessibility from these parking areas, local governments must incorporate surfaces along the pedestrian access routes that are stable, firm and slip-resistant. This requirement applies to every accessible parking space, access aisle and ingress/egress pathway. Beach stabilization mats or an approved alternative means of temporary surface stabilization may accommodate persons with disabilities.

In on-beach parking areas, one percent of all public parking spaces provided for beach access must be designated as accessible parking spaces. One in every eight accessible parking spaces, but never less than one, must be designated as a van accessible parking space. Accessible parking shall be located directly adjacent to the barriers that delineate the on-beach parking area from the pedestrian-only beach. The accessible parking spaces and their adjacent access aisles shall be level, stable, firm and slip-resistant. The accessible parking access aisle and the accessible route must be stabilized with an approved temporary surface that provides access to accessible portions of the beach.

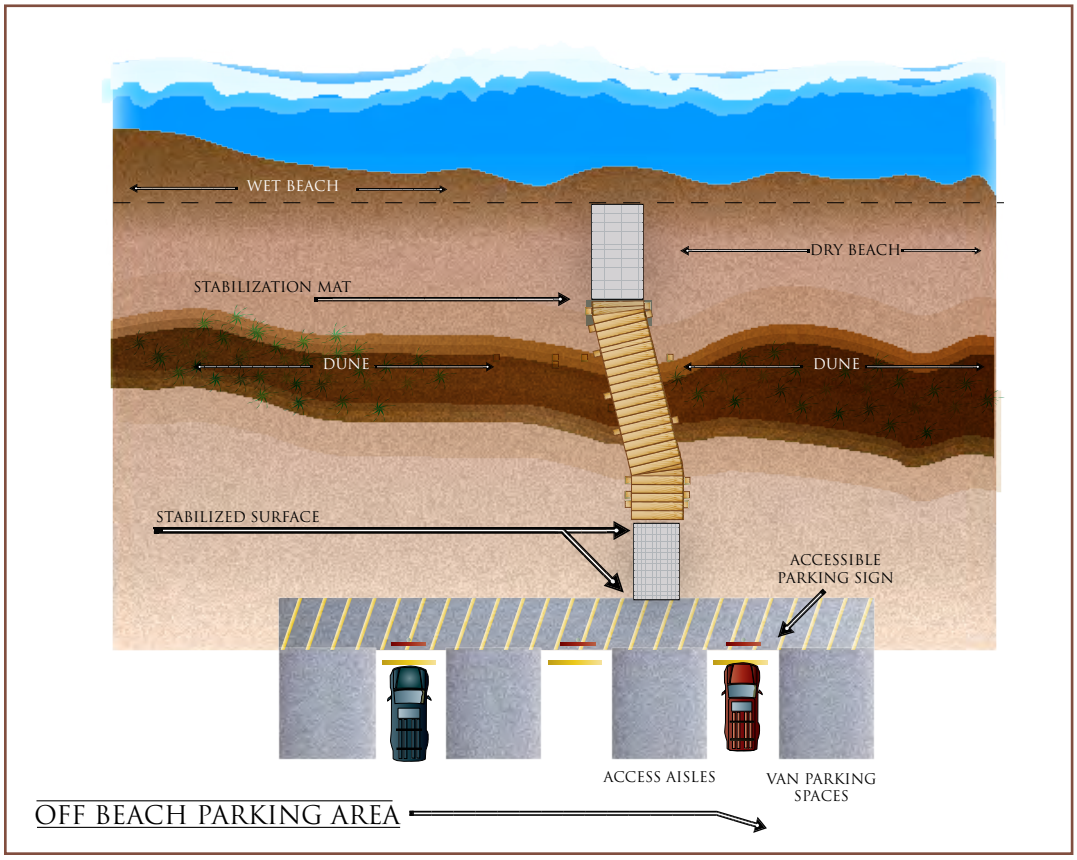


ON BEACH PARKING AREA

Off-beach Parking

Local governments may designate off-beach public parking to preserve public access to vehicular-restricted beaches or to enhance access to unrestricted vehicular beaches. Off-beach parking may be provided on public streets or in designated parking lots. To provide public access to the beach from off-beach parking areas, pedestrian pathways such as dune walkovers and footpaths must be constructed as described in this guidance document. Local governments must ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access the landward terminus of accessible beach routes from designated parking areas in accordance with TAS.

Where off-beach parking is provided for public beach access, the number of accessible spaces must be designated as accessible in accordance with TAS. One in every eight accessible parking spaces, but never less than one, must be designated as a van accessible parking space. The area designated for each accessible parking space and adjacent access aisles shall be in compliance with TAS. Accessible spaces shall be located on the shortest accessible route of travel to an accessible beach access route. Accessible spaces and the adjacent access aisles shall be located on a compliant surface to ensure accessibility to stabilized beach access routes. Refer to TAS for additional information.



If walkovers and footpaths are provided from a designated off-beach parking area to the beach, at least 50 percent of the access ways must be accessible in accordance with TAS and this guidance document.

Signage & Beach Amenities

Signage

Local governments must identify accessible beach routes as accessible by posting conspicuous signage that complies with TAS at the landward and seaward termini of the access route. Signs complying with TAS shall be provided for every accessible parking space and every required van-accessible parking space. In addition, all beach access points that provide compliant access must be identified from the adjacent major roadway with conspicuous signage.

Beach Amenities

In areas where public beach parks and restroom facilities are provided, local governments must ensure that all newly constructed, renovated or modified structures and facilities such as outdoor rinse showers and restrooms meet TAS. This also includes providing adequate access from the beach to accessible facilities and accessible parking near a facility with an accessible route from the parking area.

Beach Wheelchairs & Golf Carts

Beach Wheelchairs

Local governments should provide beach wheelchairs on the local beaches and within beach parks. There are many different types of beach wheelchairs available and local governments should evaluate which type would work best based on the conditions in the area. Local governments should determine how many chairs are necessary to serve the typical volume of beachgoers with disabilities, taking into account that once facilities and access are enhanced for individuals with disabilities, the demand may increase.

Golf Carts

Golf carts transporting persons with disabilities may be operated on public beaches regardless of local vehicular restrictions. To ensure that access for persons with disabilities is preserved, local governments must accommodate at least one ingress/egress access way for each area of beach closed to vehicular traffic. In areas where vehicles are prohibited from driving on and along the beach, golf carts transporting persons with disabilities must conspicuously display a disabled parking placard issued by the state of Texas. As it relates to the Dune Protection Act, golf carts are considered motor vehicles and must not be driven on the dunes.

Local governments may limit the use of golf carts for the transportation of persons with disabilities to electric-powered golf carts. Signage must be posted at vehicular ingress/egress access ways to inform beachgoers that gas powered golf carts are prohibited. All-terrain vehicles, neighborhood electric vehicles and recreational off-highway vehicles are not considered golf carts and may not be used to transport persons with disabilities on vehicular-restricted beaches.

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About the Texas General Land Office

The Texas General Land Office's core mission is the management of state lands and mineral-right properties totaling 13 million acres. Included in that portfolio are the beaches, bays, estuaries and other "submerged lands" out to 10.3 miles in the Gulf of Mexico. With 367 miles of Gulf beaches and more than 3,300 miles of bays and estuaries, Texas has one of the longest coastlines in the country. Here, fragile coastal environments and wildlife thrive alongside bustling ports and petrochemical facilities. Coastal industries, tourism and fisheries generate billions of dollars for the state, and the state Constitution protects the right of Texans to access their beaches. That's why the Texas General Land Office is proud to serve as the steward of the Texas coast.

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