

## Section

# 2

## The Coastal Plains

### Main Ideas

1. The five subregions of the Coastal Plains have varied landscapes and economies.
2. Texans in the Coastal Plains have both changed and adapted to their environment.

### Why It Matters Today

The Coastal Plains receive more rainfall than any other region in Texas. Use current events sources to find information about the problems too much rainfall can cause.

### Key Terms

- subregions
- bayous
- petrochemicals
- Rio Grande Valley
- lignite
- Metroplex

## The Geographer's World

As a boy, Texas naturalist Lance Rosier loved to explore the woods of East Texas. He knew the woods like the back of his hand. One overcast day, Rosier guided a friend into the woods to photograph a rare flower. He marched straight through the woods for two miles. Without searching, he stopped at a spot that had no landmarks. Astonishing his friend, Rosier said, "I saw it two years ago. Oh, here it is!"



**TEKS:** 8A, 9A, 9B,  
10A, 10B, 12A, 12B,  
13A, 13C, 21A, 21B, 21C, 22A

### myNotebook

Use the annotation tool found in your eBook to take notes on the physical and human features found in the subregions of the Coastal Plains.



## The Piney Woods

The Coastal Plains can be divided into five **subregions**, or smaller regions. The easternmost subregion of the Coastal Plains is called the Piney Woods. It is part of a pine forest that covers the entire southern United States from the Atlantic Ocean to Texas. Most of the land in the Piney Woods is rolling hills. The Piney Woods also has one of the wettest climates of any Texas subregion. Rainfall helps support a large timber industry in the heavily forested areas of the Piney Woods. Gum, hickory, oak, and pine trees are an important source of timber and wood products for the subregion. Farming is also an important part of the subregion's economy. The rich soils and wet climate are ideal for producing many fruits and vegetables. In areas where farmers have cut down forests, tall grasses have grown. Farmers raise cattle in these open grassy areas.

Oil is another valuable natural resource in this subregion. Large amounts of oil were discovered here in the 1930s. The oil industry contributes to the economy of many regional cities such as Henderson and Kilgore. The subregion's creeks, lakes, and rivers also provide it with significant water sources. The area includes the Neches, Sabine, and Trinity Rivers as well as the Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn Reservoirs. These rivers and reservoirs provide many Texans with drinking water and places of recreation.

Many people in the Piney Woods live in rural areas or small towns. These towns serve as local markets for farmers and the lumber industry. The subregion's largest cities are Longview and Texarkana. These cities have prospered as the agricultural, oil, and lumber industries have grown.

Texans have taken action to preserve some of the area's natural resources. The Big Thicket National Preserve was established to protect about 85,000 acres of trees and wildlife in the Piney Woods. This subregion also has four national forests: the Angelina National Forest, Davy Crockett National Forest, Sabine National Forest, and Sam Houston National Forest. The state conserves the natural resources of these forests. When trees are cut down, new trees are planted in their place.

**Reading Check Analyzing Information** How have the natural resources of the Piney Woods affected its economy?

## Subregions of the Coastal Plains

**Interpreting Maps** With Houston and Dallas located in the region, the Coastal Plains region is the most populated in Texas.

- 1. Locate** What rivers form the boundaries of the Coastal Plains region in Texas?
- 2. Contrasting** How do the physical characteristics differ in the five subregions?



## ★ The Gulf Coast Plain

South and west of the Piney Woods lies the Gulf Coast Plain. This subregion extends south along the Gulf Coast from the Sabine River to Corpus Christi Bay. A chain of barrier islands runs nearly the entire length of the Texas coast. These islands are covered by brush, grasses, and sand. Shallow bays separate the islands from the mainland. On the mainland near the coast, the land is marshy and full of **bayous**. A bayou is a slow-moving, swampy section of a river or a lake. Inland, scattered groves of trees dot the plain's lush grasslands.

The soil and climate of the Gulf Coast Plain have made it a rich agricultural area. Farmers grow rice in the eastern areas near the coast. Farther south, in the Coastal Bend area, farmers produce cotton and grains. The coastal grasslands also support one of the largest livestock industries in Texas. The Gulf waters are another valuable resource. Fishing and shrimping are major sources of income for many Texans.

Oil is another resource, with offshore oil rigs providing many jobs for Texans. The center of the Texas and U.S. oil-refining industry lies between Beaumont and Houston. The area also has a large **petrochemicals** industry. Petrochemicals are chemicals made from oil and natural gas. They are used in most industries. Ports provide another boost to the economy of the Gulf Coast Plain. Some of the largest cities in this subregion are port cities: Houston, Corpus Christi, Beaumont, Galveston, and Port Arthur. Products are shipped in and out of these ports to destinations worldwide. As global markets have expanded, these ports have become increasingly busy. Houston is the largest city in Texas and has the fourth-largest population in the United States. Houston–The Woodlands–Sugarland is a metropolitan area that stretches for more than 10,000 square miles and, with a population of more than 6 million, is the fifth-largest metropolitan area in the nation. Although Houston lies about 50 miles inland, a huge channel connects the city with the Gulf of Mexico. Houston is one of the largest seaports in the nation and a major center for international shipping. The natural resources of the Gulf Coast Plain boost its industry and attract many people to this subregion.

**Reading Check Evaluating** How have national and international markets affected the Gulf Coast Plain?

## ★ Texas Cities ★



### Houston

**History:** Houston was founded in August 1836 by Augustus and John Allen. The Allen brothers chose a site along the Buffalo Bayou, hoping the town would become an important port. Houston was the capital for a short period during the days of the Republic. However, the town did not begin to boom until the 1900s when the oil industry grew.

**Population in 2012:** 2,160,821 (estimate)

**Relative location:** Houston is located in the southeast corner of Texas.

**Region:** Gulf Coastal Plain

**County:** County seat of Harris County

**Special feature:** Largest city in Texas

**Origin of name:** Houston was named by the Allen brothers in honor of Sam Houston.

**Economy:** Houston has one of the busiest ports in the nation, making the city a global trade center. Houston also has many oil drilling, refining, and other production facilities. Oil-related industries, such as plastics and petrochemicals, have boomed in this region. Houston is also home to the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center.




**Analyzing Primary Sources**  
**Identifying Bias** Do you think DeWees liked the South Texas landscape?

## **The South Texas Plains**

The South Texas Plains subregion lies to the west of the Gulf Coast Plain. The South Texas Plains extends south to the Gulf of Mexico, where the land is low and flat. In the northern and western areas of the subregion, the land rises gradually and becomes more hilly. The climate in this subregion is drier than in the Gulf Coast Plain. Grasslands cover the coastal section, but dense brushlands characterize the subregion farther inland. One early traveler in South Texas noted the interesting plant life of the region.

### **TEXAS VOICES**

 “The road is oftimes [often] completely hedged in [lined] for miles by long rows of prickly pear. . . . All the shrubbery throughout this country is covered with thorns.”

—William B. DeWees, quoted in *Texas: A Geography*, by Terry Jordan, et al.



### **Padre Island**

One of the most unusual features of the Coastal Plains region is Padre Island. This 133-mile-long island has the longest sand beach in the United States. The island is covered in sand dunes and is home to more than 600 different types of plants. The Padre Island National Seashore helps protect the island's natural beauty. Thousands of visitors come to relax and take in the scenery. **What is the most notable feature of Padre Island?**

The South Texas Plains subregion has many natural resources. One of the richest farming areas in the nation—the **Rio Grande valley**—lies in this subregion. Temperatures there are warm for most of the year, and freezes are rare. The Valley has fertile soils from sediment washed down the Rio Grande. Farmers grow citrus fruits, such as grapefruits and oranges, in large quantities. Vegetable crops, sugarcane, and specialty crops such as aloe vera add to the area's wealth. Many people in the Valley work in farming-related businesses.

Ranches are also common throughout the South Texas Plains. King Ranch is the largest of these ranches, stretching for more than 1 million acres, or 1,562 square miles. Oil and natural gas wells dot the landscape, but farming and ranching are the main sectors of this subregion's economy.

Although the South Texas Plains subregion is largely rural, it does include several cities. The subregion's largest city is San Antonio. Founded in 1718 by Spaniards, the city is home to many historic buildings and is



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one of the state's most popular tourist attractions. San Antonio is also home to several large military bases. These bases play an important role in the local economy. San Antonio is a retail trade center for the South Texas region and a major center for international trade with Mexico.

Although San Antonio is the largest city in this subregion, Laredo is the fastest growing. Other border towns such as Brownsville, Harlingen, and McAllen are also expanding rapidly. While tourism and international trade are important to these cities, farming is still the area's most important economic activity.

**Reading Check Summarizing** What are the natural resources of the South Texas Plains, and how do Texans use them to develop the subregion's economy?



## The Post Oak Belt

The Post Oak Belt subregion begins just outside of San Antonio and stretches north to the Red River, covering a considerable area in east-central Texas. The Post Oak Belt lies west of both the Piney Woods and the Gulf Coast Plain. The belt has a similar climate to the Piney Woods but receives a little less rainfall. The area's soil is sandier, and its land is mostly flat. In addition, grassland prairies cover parts of the Post Oak Belt.

A few parts of the Post Oak Belt are covered in trees such as post oak, blackjack oak, elm, hickory, pecan, and walnut. Mesquite trees have become increasingly common in the Post Oak Belt. Early settlers cleared many of the subregion's native trees for farming. Cotton is a major crop in this area.

Other important crops are corn and sorghum—a grain grown to feed livestock. Livestock is a major industry in the Post Oak Belt, with many farmers raising cattle and hogs. The regional economy also depends on natural energy resources found underground, such as oil and natural gas. In addition, deposits of **lignite**, a type of soft coal, are mined there.

As in the Piney Woods, most residents of the Post Oak Belt live in rural areas. However, a number of towns and small cities are scattered throughout the area. The largest cities are Bryan–College Station and Tyler. Manufacturing industries such as food processing, furniture construction, and metalworking have developed in these cities. Texas A&M University, one of the state's top educational institutions, is located in this subregion.

**Reading Check Drawing Inferences and Conclusions** How have Texans changed and adapted to the environment of the Post Oak Belt?



### Interpreting Visuals

**Downtown Dallas.** Many corporations have located their headquarters in downtown Dallas. **How do you think these businesses have affected the growth of the city?**

## ★ The Blackland Prairie

The Blackland Prairie subregion stretches west alongside the Post Oak Belt. The climate here is similar to the Post Oak Belt climate; it is wet and mild. Rolling prairies cover the landscape. The area's rich black soils make it ideal for farming. Farmers here grow cotton, grains, and vegetables. Farmers also raise cattle, chickens, and hogs.

The Blackland Prairie is one of the most heavily populated subregions in Texas. Its many cities include Dallas, Garland, Grand Prairie, Mesquite, Plano, Richardson, Sherman, Temple, and Waco. Dallas, which is located in the northern area of the Blackland Prairie, is the third-largest city in Texas. This city has many industries. Home to a Federal Reserve Bank, Dallas is the center of the banking industry in both Texas and most of the Southwest. Many national insurance and oil companies have their corporate headquarters there. Dallas is also a major center for the international cotton market. The computer age began there at Texas Instruments. The Dallas economy is based in part on the manufacture of items ranging from computer electronics to missile parts and high-fashion clothing.

Dallas lies 33 miles east of Fort Worth, a city in a neighboring subregion. The economies of the two cities—and the cities that surround them—are so interlinked that people refer to them as the **Metroplex**. The two cities are a major transportation hub. The Dallas–Fort Worth International Airport is located between them. Interstate 35 is an important trade route that runs through both Dallas and Fort Worth. The highway starts at the Mexican border and runs through the United States almost to Canada. The many roads and railroads around the Metroplex help to promote the area's growth.

**Reading Check Evaluating** How has transportation affected the Blackland Prairie region?

## ★ Section 2 Review

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**ONLINE QUIZ**

### 1. Define and explain:

- subregions
- bayous
- petrochemicals
- lignite

### 2. Locate on a map:

- Rio Grande valley
- Piney Woods
- Gulf Coast Plain
- South Texas Plains
- Post Oak Belt
- Blackland Prairie

### 3. Categorizing

Copy the table below, adding a column for each subregion. Identify the subregions, their location, and their special physical and human features.

Subregion	
Location	
Special Physical and Human Features	

### 4. Finding the Main Idea

- What industries have encouraged the growth of cities in the Coastal Plains region?
- How are the South Texas Plains and the Blackland Prairie similar and different?

### 5. Writing and Critical Thinking

 myWriteSmart

**Summarizing** Compare the subregions of the Coastal Plains and describe how Texans have adapted to and modified their environments. Consider the following:

- climate, landscape, minerals, and soils
- human economic activity in each subregion