

COMMISSION
SHIFT

2024

IMPACT REPORT

Reforming Oil & Gas Oversight in Texas





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reflections from Our Founder	3
Orphaned Wells Tour: A Call for Generational Responsibility	4
Carbon Capture and Storage: Safeguarding Our Water	6
Amplifying Community Voices: Open Meeting Attendance and Beyond	7
Candidate Forum: Bringing Visibility to Railroad Commission Elections	9
Media Reflections: Earning Our Place in Texas Energy Conversations	10
Financial Picture	11
Looking Ahead: A Note from Commission Shift	12

The artwork on the cover of this report was created by Jacob Cardenas for Commission Shift's 2024 Poster Contest. An artist from Laredo, Texas, Jacob is studying for a BA in Art at Texas A&M International University. His work captures the vibrant Tex-Mex culture of the U.S./Mexican border, drawing inspiration from his experiences and community to tell powerful visual stories.



REFLECTIONS FROM OUR FOUNDER

Commission Shift was formed both from a deep love of Texas and a belief that Texans deserve good governance. Our natural resources and well-being are worth protecting. The Railroad Commission (RRC), our state oil and gas oversight agency, can and should do a better job in supporting reforms that prepare Texans for our energy future.

Our first impact report comes almost four years after Commission Shift launched. With a small team of media consultants, board members, and advisors, we had planned a public announcement webinar for the last week of February in 2021. Then Winter Storm Uri hit on Valentine's Day. We were still in lockdown from the pandemic. Emotions were high, food was short, and sewage systems were failing after over four million homes and businesses lost power.

The RRC knew in 2011 that they needed to weatherize the natural gas supply chain to avoid future fuel shortages at gas-fired power plants, but the commission deferred to operators who wanted to do nothing. Too often, public voices have been left out of decision-making at the RRC — with dire consequences. Over the past four years, Commission Shift has changed that paradigm.



Some of our progress feels small and incremental, and other gains have been bigger than I could have imagined. All are needed. I'm incredibly proud of the Texas we are building for the next generations, and I know that we can continue to move our state to a healthier, safer, and more secure future.

“The thing I’m most proud of is that Commission Shift is bringing hope to people who will no longer tolerate injustice.”

Commission Shift serves many functions. One of the first is shining light on an obscure yet vital state agency. We're doing deep research, documenting important events, and making it easy to understand. We're creating a place for families to convene to defend themselves and share their vision for Texas. The thing I'm most proud of is that Commission Shift is bringing hope to people who will no longer tolerate injustice.

Thank you for joining us to help protect the things we love.

Virginia Palacios
Founder and Executive Director





ORPHANED WELLS TOUR

A Call for Generational Responsibility

Texas' laws for plugging inactive oil, gas, and injection wells were crafted so favorably toward companies that they failed to consider how the pile-up of unplugged wells could create hazards and groundwater contamination. After decades of the Texas legislature largely letting companies off the hook for plugging their own wells, the problem has gotten so bad that significant disaster sites loom on the Texas landscape, with the RRC continuing to brush off responsibility. Still, we hear some elected officials doubting how bad the problem really is.

Building public support to address this problem is the only way to fix it. In May, Commission Shift partnered with impacted community members in West Texas to give public officials and concerned citizens a first-hand view of unplugged wells in Pecos County. The wells and disaster sites are examples of the real-world impact of a captive agency turning on the public.

154,000+
ORPHANED AND INACTIVE WELLS IN TEXAS





“The tour served as a stark reminder of the importance of addressing orphaned wells and the critical need for policy intervention to prevent further environmental and health hazards.”

Alyssa Wallace, Former Field Organizer



The first stop of the tour was Santa Rosa Spring, a once glittering water hole now dry because of the volume of fracking in the area.

At the next stop, landowner Schuyler Wight pointed out an open well head on his property which was once used for oil extraction. About 15 feet away is a water well. Mr. Wight wrapped a rope around an empty bottle and dropped it in the water well, only to bring it back up full of oil.



The final stop was Lake Boehmer. Mr. Wight explained how initially the well spewing toxic water was for oil or gas production but was then converted to a water well and left unplugged.

CARBON CAPTURE AND STORAGE

Safeguarding Our Water



Commission Shift's role in defending groundwater against the impacts of carbon capture and storage (CCS) has resulted in some of our most impactful wins of the year. Human-induced climate change is affecting our economy, our safety, and our health. But experimental technologies like carbon capture and storage (CCS), designed to dispose of waste greenhouse gas emissions come with tradeoffs. Long-term storage carbon dioxide (CO₂) injection wells can result in groundwater acidification, especially in the many parts of Texas where inactive oil and gas wells remain unplugged and can become a pathway for CO₂ to leak into aquifers.

Despite the railroad commissioners' stances that climate change is not human-caused, they all voted for the RRC to pursue "primacy" over Class VI CO₂ injection wells from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which would give them sole permitting and regulatory authority over Class VI wells in Texas. Primacy would unleash widespread, commercial development of CCS wells and pipelines throughout Texas.

One of our biggest moments came in June, when the EPA acknowledged that our letter documenting sinkholes, geyser-like well blowouts, leaks, and earthquakes related to the RRC's oversight of Class II injection wells raised "substantial concerns" that would need to be evaluated through "extensive and thorough technical and legal review." The EPA's letter spurred the RRC to initiate its own investigation of its injection well program. Members of the public gave comment at RRC Open Meetings to further document and bring forward incidents of groundwater contamination related to injection wells. And later this year, the RRC asked the state legislature for more funds to staff an internal investigation team for the injection well program. These are tangible victories towards better oversight that will protect groundwater.



2,000+

PRIMACY PETITION SIGN-ONS

AMPLIFYING COMMUNITY VOICES

Open Meeting Attendance and Beyond

Commission Shift has led a grassroots organizing campaign to bring community voices directly to the forefront of Railroad Commission decision-making. Through consistent engagement at Railroad Commission Open Meetings, impacted community members and advocates are raising awareness about the risks of poorly managed oil and gas operations. These efforts have already resulted in meaningful public discussions and are laying the groundwork for stronger protections and enforcement measures.



More than 140 people signed on to have their name attached to dozens of flowers delivered to the Railroad Commissioners at the March open meeting.



Valentine's Day Action

After the abrupt cancellation of the Railroad Commission's February open meeting, Commission Shift organized a Valentine's Day-themed public engagement event at the March open meeting.

"Through our open meeting presence, we embraced the Valentine's Day spirit of love in action, creating a first-of-its-kind collaboration that brought our allies and network leaders together to shift the Railroad Commission with love for good governance, our communities, and Texas' natural resources."

Marté Valadez, Organizing Director



Waste Pits Tailgate

During the October Open Meeting of the Railroad Commission, we organized a “zombie brigade” to engage in a Halloween-themed action outside the commission building. This meeting fell on the same date as the deadline for public comments on the new statewide waste pits, commercial recycling, and water protection rules. Our event highlighted how waste pits across Texas are filled with mystery sludge that threatens our water sources and jeopardizes public health and safety.



THIS YEAR, COMMISSION SHIFT HOSTED 24 COMMUNITY EVENTS





CANDIDATE FORUM

Bringing Visibility to Railroad Commissioner Elections

This election season, Commission Shift hosted the only gathering of Railroad Commissioner Candidates to speak to the issues facing oil and gas oversight. During the event, attendees had the unique opportunity to hear directly from three of the four candidates for Railroad Commissioner on their vision for the state oil and gas agency and its oversight of Texas's shifting energy landscape. The forum took place on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin and was also virtually streamed with live Spanish interpretation, ensuring accessibility for English- and Spanish-speaking Texans across the state. The event received significant media attention, including a two-part segment on KUT News, Austin's local NPR channel, and other coverage from Texas Tribune, Houston Public Media, and more.



150+
REGISTERED ATTENDEES

MEDIA REFLECTIONS



Earning Our Place in Texas Energy Conversations

In the four short years since our founding, Commission Shift has established our credibility as a leading source for information about the Railroad Commission and issues related to oil and gas — bringing facts, stories, and sources to the media’s attention and reaching audiences across the state and country. Several journalists are now on the “Railroad Commission beat” for their newsroom. These stories are vital for the public to make informed decisions about issues that impact their lives.



By deeply researching the policy surrounding the issues, publishing blogs, pitching to new platforms, and creating regular monthly touch points with reporters, Commission Shift is helping everyday Texans learn and take action on energy issues that affect their lives.

SJ Stout, Senior Communications Manager

78

STATEWIDE AND NATIONAL NEWS HITS IN 2024

Our activity collecting community input for the Railroad Commission’s annual Monitoring and Enforcement Plan led to the **Dallas Morning News** Editorial Board to publish an editorial citing and agreeing with Commission Shift’s recommendations for better public engagement and transparency from the state oil and gas agency. The commission ended up accepting many of our recommendations in its final plan.

As Texas becomes a hub for carbon capture and storage, Commission Shift’s concerns with the safety and efficacy of carbon dioxide storage — as well as potential Railroad Commission oversight — have been advanced in Reuters, Politico’s Energy Wire, the Texas Tribune, the Houston Chronicle, and more.

23

REPORTS, BLOGS, & RESOURCES IN 2024

Interactive Maps: Texas Waste Pits



CCS Hub



Flaring Report



We are leading engagement and producing educational resources that decision-makers and everyday Texans rely on to shed light on the powerful state agency that too often flies under the radar.

FINANCIAL PICTURE



- Net Assets/Multi-Year Grants (57%)
- Unrestricted Contributions (36%)
- Restricted Contributions (7%)
- Miscellaneous Income (<1%)

Total: \$1,487,891

*2023 Audited Financials



- Program Services (74%)
- Management and General (21%)
- Fundraising (5%)

Total: \$1,336,886

*2023 Audited Financials

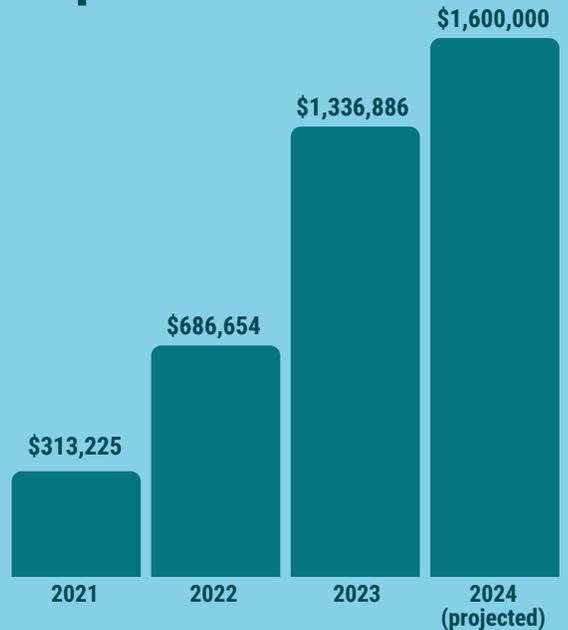


To view our audited financial statements and 990, go to bit.ly/CS2024ImpactReportDocs

Commission Shift is deeply grateful for the generosity of our funders, whose steadfast support empowers us to protect Texas’ water and natural resources for current and future generations. Every dollar we receive fuels the programs and partnerships that make this work possible, ensuring a legacy of accountability and sustainability.

Thanks to your support, we ended 2023 in a strong financial position, with \$1.49M raised and 74% of our resources dedicated to direct programmatic impact. Together, we are shaping a future where natural resources are preserved, communities are protected, and generational responsibility remains at the heart of everything we do. We are honored to have you as part of this journey.

Expenses, 2021-2024





LOOKING AHEAD



A Note from Commission Shift

From the very beginning, Commission Shift has been guided by the belief that Texas's energy future can be fair, transparent, and accountable to the people of Texas. When we started this journey, public participation in energy decision-making was limited, and the risks to our water, land, and communities often went unnoticed. Today, thanks to the dedication of our supporters and the power of community voices, we are seeing real momentum toward a system that prioritizes people and protects what we hold dear.

We are inspired by the determination of Texans who stand together to protect our shared resources and our legacy. We are humbled by the trust and collaboration of those who share our vision for change. As we look to the future, we remain committed to amplifying community voices, advancing policies that safeguard our water and land, and holding decision-makers accountable.

Together, we can build a Texas that honors its people, its heritage, and its future.