



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 17, 2014

Ms. Laura Russell
Attorney
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744-3291

OR2014-20840

Dear Ms. Russell:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 546710 (TPWD# 2014-09-R50).

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 through 552.154 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim.

We must address the department's procedural obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code when requesting a decision from this office under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), within ten business days after receiving a written request the governmental body must request a ruling from this office and state the exceptions to disclosure that apply. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body must submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or

representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. *Id.* § 552.301(e). In this instance, you state the department received the request for information on September 18, 2014. Thus, the department's ten-business-day deadline was October 2, 2014. However, the envelope in which you submitted the information under section 552.301(b) bears a post meter mark of October 3, 2014. *See id.* § 552.308(a) (prescribing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Further, as of the date of this letter, you have not submitted for our review written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply or a copy or representative sample of the information requested. Consequently, we find the department failed to comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption the requested information is public and must be released unless a compelling reason exists to withhold the information from disclosure. *See id.* § 552.302; *Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to section 552.302); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 630 (1994). Generally, a compelling reason to withhold information exists where some other source of law makes the information confidential or where third party interests are at stake. Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because the department failed to comply with the procedural requirements of the Act, the department has waived all of its discretionary exceptions to disclosure. *See* Open Records Decision No. 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions). Although the department also raises mandatory exceptions to disclosure, because you have not submitted the requested information for our review, we have no basis for finding any of the information excepted from disclosure or confidential by law. Thus, we have no choice but to order the requested information released pursuant to section 552.302. If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge this ruling in court pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Paige Thompson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

PT/eb

Ref: ID# 546710

c: Requestor