

- SUBJECT:** Establishing a coastal prairie research and education institute
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Lozano, Raney, Alonzo, Alvarado, Button, Clardy, Howard, Morrison, Turner
- 0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — Evelyn Merz; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Bill Kelly, Mayor's Office, City of Houston)
- Against — None
- On — Steven Pennings, University of Houston
- BACKGROUND:** The University of Houston Coastal Center (UHCC) is a 925-acre center in LaMarque, Texas, that includes more than 200 acres of undisturbed coastal prairie. UHCC provides research and education on a number of areas related to protecting, preserving, and restoring the coastal prairie.
- Observers have noted that a special designation for the UHCC would raise its profile and provide more opportunities for competitive grants and other research funding, as well as enhance efforts to preserve and research an endangered natural habitat.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 2285 would establish the Texas Institute for Coastal Prairie Research and Education at the University of Houston. The organization, control, and management of the institute would be vested in the board of regents of the University of Houston system. The institute would be required to:
- conduct environmental research and education on coastal prairie and prairie restoration and provide a setting for other entities to conduct similar research and education; and
  - provide national leadership and education on the best methods to

restore coastal prairie.

The University of Houston would be required to encourage public and private entities to participate in or support the operation of the institute and could enter into an agreement with any public or private entity for that purpose. An agreement could allow the institute to provide information, services, or other assistance to an entity in exchange for the entity's participation or support.

The University of Houston System's board of regents could solicit, accept, and administer gifts and grants from any public or private source for the institute. The board also could hire personnel for the institute as necessary.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2017.