

City of Austin BCP Report
BCCP Coordinating Committee Meeting
October 15, 2014 – May 1, 2015

Program Administration

BCCP Infrastructure Training Workshop

- This annual workshop was held on October 30, 2014 at UT's J. J. Pickle Research Campus.

Permits

- The BCCP annual reports were submitted to Travis County in late December 2014/early January 2015. Travis County compiled and submitted the report to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the reports are now available on Travis County's website at <https://www.traviscountytexas.gov/tnr/bccp/2014-annual-report>.
- Annual scientific permit reports were submitted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in December 2014.
- City Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) staff has issued 10 BCP research permits to conduct research on the BCP in 2015. 2015 projects include quantification of soil bacteria and fungi (soil metagenomics), ant diversity and abundance, cave research and restoration, Jollyville Plateau salamander monitoring and research, water quality and quantity monitoring for Water Treatment Plan 4, tick population densities as disease vectors in Austin parks and preserves, and presence/absence surveys for emerald ash borer in an Austin park.

Biological Monitoring

Karst

- Tawny crazy ants (TCAs) were first observed negatively impacting cave fauna in Whirlpool Cave in June 2013, and on November 20, 2014, TCA's were discovered in no rent cave. In an effort to monitor impacts, City and Travis County staff continues to monitor Whirlpool Cave as well as no rent and Weldon cave (in close proximity to TCA's). We still anticipate that this new invader will have a major negative effect on cave fauna. The section 6 grant proposal (investigate possible methods of treating TCAs within the cave cricket foraging area) was denied due to lack of funding, however, City and Travis County BCP staffs along with Ed LeBrun (UT Fire Ant Lab) resubmitted the grant proposal in November (ongoing).
- BCCP Karst Substitution Process: Travis County, COA BCP and Watershed Protection Department (WPD), and USFWS staffs are currently working on a document that defines and gives direction the process for cave substitution (for caves on the BCP permit).
- Conducting cave faunal surveys and cave cricket exit counts (ongoing).
- Monitoring cave conditions, removing trash, and treating for red-imported fire ants (ongoing).
- BCP Staff is continuing to assist Nico Hauwert and the Watershed Protection Department with the Blowing Sink critical environmental feature (CEF) stabilization CIP project. Several major recharge features/caves are unstable, leading to large amounts of sediment washing into the aquifer. The project will stabilize these features, thus improving water quality to Barton Springs. This project is nearing completion. (ongoing)
- In an effort to educate the public about the importance of caves and cave fauna, Nico Hauwert initiated an effort to find local non-BCP caves that would be appropriate for educational purposes. Staff and volunteers are currently excavating several karst features. (ongoing)
- Cave public access: A cave collaboration group of City and County staff and volunteers met regarding guidelines for future public access to local caves including some BCP permit caves. The goal is to try to determine which caves are appropriate for public access, determine the appropriate number allowed per cave, and come up with a permitting system that would determine qualifications needed for leading cave tours (ongoing).
- Restoration and monitoring efforts have begun at 2 endangered species caves located in the courtyard at McNeil High. Nico Hauwert and McNeil High School science teacher Tina Vick are leading the restoration effort along with help from FWS, City and Travis County BCP staff. Travis

County and City BCP staffs are currently conducting cave faunal surveys and cricket exit counts with the goal of including student participation for long term monitoring and potential research projects that will benefit the listed species. Travis County and City BCP staff has also held 2 volunteer clean up dates, removing large volumes of trash. City staff has provided plants for this project, planting 86 trees and shrubs, many of which provide forage for cave crickets (ongoing).

- City BCP and WPD staff continue to comment on the SH45 SW Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), trying to bring attention to existing problematic issues such as the fact that the FEIS was completed prior to the completion of the Flintridge hydrological study (ongoing).
- COA WPD staff is looking into acquiring a 5.82 acre tract immediately adjacent to Goat cave karst preserve. This acquisition would greatly increase the size of the preserve thus better protecting the BCP permit caves.

Golden-Cheeked Warbler (GCWA)

- USFS Project: Interlocal Agreement with the US Forest Service (Dr. Frank Thompson, Jennifer Reidy) to provide GCWA Population Viability and Habitat Suitability modeling within the BCP.
 - 5-year study, focuses on four primary questions:
 - What is the absolute abundance of the GCWA on the BCP and on individual macrosites?
 - How do demographics (e.g. density, productivity, survival) vary with landscape and habitat factors?
 - How viable are these populations?
 - How do various management scenarios influence population viability?
 - Currently collecting fifth year of data in collaboration with BCP partners (Audubon, LCRA, Travis County, Wild Basin) and 42 volunteers.
 - Data summaries to date:
 - Color-banded 126 GCWAs (93 males, 5 females, 28 nestlings) on 18 intensive study plots
 - ~140 GCWA nests
 - Return rates (79 GCWA returns from 2011-2014):
 - 69 males (34%)
 - 6 females (26%)
 - 3 males and 1 female banded as nestlings in 2014 (8%)
 - Staff has observed a few GCWAs with symptoms of avian pox, an infectious viral disease characterized by wart-like nodules or lesions on featherless areas of the body transmitted by mosquitoes and contact with surfaces contaminated by the pox virus. Pox-like symptoms were previously reported in GCWAs and other birds in 2012.
 - Staff found a dead GCWA male on City Park Road on April 7, 2015. The male was banded on March 27, 2014 and found about 300 meters east of where he was banded.

Black-capped Vireo (BCVI)

- Forest Ridge: 3-4 BCVI territories, including a male banded by William Simper/Travis County in 2009 (this BCVI male is 7 years old).
- Kent Butler: 2-3 BCVIs. A male banded last year has returned to Kent Butler, the first known return to the Kent Butler preserve. One female has been observed. All the BCVIs at Kent Butler are residing in areas where BCP staff worked with the utility providers to improve the habitat under the Austin Energy and LCRA electric transmission lines.
- COA BCP staff and volunteers are continuing to implement demonstration projects at the Vireo Preserve to promote slope stabilization, soil restoration, and regeneration of native plants on degraded areas that are currently not habitat for either the GCWA or BCVI. Since Vireo Preserve supports many of the habitat types observed throughout the BCP, lessons learned from restoration work at this site should be applicable to other areas within the BCP.

Jollyville Plateau Salamander (JPS)

- COA BCP staff assisted the Watershed Protection Department with several JPS surveys.

Bracted Twistflower

- Non-native *Jasminum mesneyi* encroaching on a group of twistflowers at Ullrich were pulled. More needs to be done to eliminate the non-native from the tract.
- Plans for fence to protect Bracted Twistflower at Mount Bonnell: see Fencing Projects, below.
- 2015 surveys for Bracted Twistflower are currently being conducted

Preserve Management

Dual-Managed Lands

- AWU and PARD are working to close and restore trails within the Connors Creek critical water quality protection zone in Emma Long Motocross Park. Additional signs are scheduled for installation. Staff is developing a stream assessment, restoration and monitoring plan with assistance from staff in the Watershed Protection Department.
- The proposed Mount Bonnell fencing to protect bracted twistflower habitat and keep people off the bluff has been designed and is being taken by PARD to the Historic Landmark Commission and Parks and Recreation Board for approval. Construction will begin in the fall.
- PARD and BCP staffs are working with the Hill Country Conservancy on the installation of 911/mile markers in the Barton Creek Greenbelt
- Barton Creek homeless camps: see Law Enforcement below

Infrastructure Management

- BCP staff worked with a number of infrastructure providers on scheduled maintenance activities during the non-nesting season (ongoing).
- LCRA successfully completed their upgrade of the T-160 line which runs through the Bull Creek macrosite and received construction approval from BCCP. LCRA worked closely with BCP and WPD staff to avoid impacts to endangered/threatened species and habitats.
- BCP is currently working with the West Travis County PUA (WTCPUA) on construction of a new water service line which includes drilling underneath Barton Creek.

Law Enforcement

- River Place Nature Trail (MUD trail).
 - The trail decommissioning and restoration work has been completed
 - A fence was completed to help control trespass onto City property
- Homeless camps are an ongoing management challenge in the Barton Creek Greenbelt. City Wildland Conservation and PARD staff continues to monitor these sites and remove camps as they are discovered.
- Major vandalism and theft occurred at the Blowing sink tract, APD arrested 2 suspects.
- Major unauthorized tree clearing occurred on the Jester tract at Bottlebrush Drive. The damage assessment is ongoing.

Invasive Species/Animal Management

- See Tawny Crazy Ants, above.
- BCP staff is continuing efforts to remove non-native plants on COA BCP tracts.
- BCP staff is actively removing feral hogs.
- BCP staff is treating red imported fire ants with boiling water adjacent to BCP caves.
- BCP staff completed deer management in the fall, removing a low number of deer. Staff is currently evaluating deer management needs for 2015/2016 season.

Oak Wilt

- BCP staff inspected known oak wilt centers on the Barton Creek/Friesenhahn, Emma Long, JJ&T, Cortaña, Hanks, Canyon Creek, Long Canyon, and Reicher Ranch tracts over the summer, monitoring movement of the fungus and success of control trenches.

Fencing Projects

- A fence was constructed on the Cortana Preserve near the River Place trail.
- We are currently preparing bids for fences for installation in the fall on the Jester, Forest Ridge and Cortana tracts.

Fire Management

- Wildland Conservation Division (WCD) staff participated in the creation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Travis County. The final draft is complete and has been rolled out to the public.
- WCD staff worked with the Austin Fire Department Wildfire Division to implement additional fuel mitigation projects during the fall on the Kent Butler tract adjacent to the Jester subdivision. The work met the specifications in the City of Austin Fuel Treatments in Juniper and Juniper-Oak Woodlands, Best Management Practices within the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.
- Prepped and burned (R/X Burn) the Circle at Reicher. 0.33 acres burned.
- Prepped the Shinnery at Cortana for R/X Burn. Weather did not allow this section of the Cortana tract to be burned this year.