

Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) Update for McGregor, Wheless and Westcave Preserves

BCCP CAC/SAC Meetings – July 28-29, 2015

City of Cedar Park Water Main Reshred at Wheless

In February 2015, the City of Cedar Park informed LCRA about mowing the existing water main that runs through the Wheless Preserve. The City of Cedar Park obtained a Section 10(a) permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) when they constructed the water line to mitigate for the construction and maintenance of the water line so BCCP coordination was not necessary. The water line easement was mowed by a City of Cedar Park contractor in February 2015 (prior to the breeding season for the Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA). The water line was not in the designated critical habitat for the Jollyville Plateau Salamander.

Road Maintenance at Wheless

In February 2015, LCRA's, Natural Resources Conservation department completed needed road maintenance (e.g. fixing ruts and smoothing out the road) to the main road that leads into the preserve to allow access by LCRA staff, emergency responders and other entities. An internal checklist was submitted for LCRA subject matter experts to review and LCRA Environmental Field Services conducted a field visit with the Natural Resources Conservation employee who conducted the work prior to the work occurring. These measure help to ensure the protection of endangered and threatened species on the preserve as well as water quality protection and the preservation of potential cultural resources. Only onsite materials were used to prevent the introduction of invasive species (e.g. tawny crazy ants). In addition, ground disturbance was limited. Selective limbs were removed along the road to facilitate access. Most were live oak and Ashe juniper branches. LCRA's Oak Wilt Prevention Policy was discussed and followed.

GCWA Territory Mapping at Wheless

The approximately 93.2 acre Prime Plot was surveyed between April and May 2015 following USFWS minimum procedures for determining presence/absence as well as GCWA territory-level mapping in accordance to the *Land Management Plan Protocol for Conducting Territory Mapping on BCP Lands*. Blanton & Associates, Inc. was contracted to complete this work. Blanton & Associates observed GCWA at 139 points in the Prime Plot, including 131 observations of males and eight observations of females. No banded birds were observed during the surveys. Blanton & Associates estimate six full territories and three edge territories. Territory density in the Prime Plot was estimated at 8.0 GCWA per 100 acres. This calculation was based on six full territories and three edge territories in 93.2 acres. The pairing success rate in the Prime Plot was 50 percent (three out of the six full territories). The breeding success rate was estimated at 20 percent, based on one of the six full territories in which juveniles were detected (territory C). The maximum brood size was four, again based on the observations on territory C. The productivity was estimated at 0.8, based on the four juveniles and six full territories. Blanton & Associates conducted an identical survey of the Prime Plot in 2014 (B&A 2014). Overall, more GCWA (males, females, and juveniles) were observed in 2015 over the previous year. This resulted in more territories and a higher GCWA density.

PEC Emergency Work at McGregor

On May 22, 2015, Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) contacted LCRA and City of Austin (COA) Wildland Conservation Division concerning the need to access LCRA's McGregor

preserve to repair broken cross arms on one of their electrical lines. COA made the determination that the project falls under the emergency maintenance provision of Appendix B. COA also stated that PEC should strictly adhere to LCRA's Oak Wilt Prevention Policy and for PEC to provide written notification describing the emergency work within 5 working days after the work is completed.

On June 2, 2015, an LCRA Natural Resources Conservation employee trimmed some trees along the existing access road to allow PEC crews access without damaging trees that had grown into the access road. LCRA's Oak Wilt Prevention Policy was followed (e.g. all wounds painted immediately) and LCRA's Oak Wilt Prevention form completed, reviewed and filed.

On June 9, 2015 PEC's contractor, T&D Solutions, was able to safely access and repair two damaged power poles, along the east boundary at McGregor– conditions were improved since the rain events, and all parties were very thankful to LCRA for our help with this emergency situation, and helping them to gain access. One brace had failed on the bottom, on the vertical pole, and the other failed on the top, where it connected to the horizontal member. It appeared that the one pole, and possibly both had been struck by lightning during a recent thunderstorm, evidenced by the splintered diagonal brace.



Exotic Plants on Wheless

In June 2015, COA Endangered Species Biologist completed a helicopter survey of the BCP and informed LCRA that no oak wilt was seen on the Wheless preserve, but they did find some tree-of-heaven. The biologist requested access to Wheless to flag the exotic trees or collect GPS points of their locations to aid LCRA staff when managing exotics. The biologist also requested to check the flow for the Jollyville Plateau Salamanders located on the preserve. LCRA granted access, but the biologist have not entered the preserve to date (6/18/15).

Westcave Preserve Land Management Activities

Land management work at Westcave Preserve over the last several months include boundary checks, formal trail inspection, water quality testing, trail maintenance (trimming, rock removal, water mitigation off of the trail, bench replacements and post replacements), invasive species removal (fig trees), fence repairs and the installation of four Malta Star Thistle Research plots.