

City of Austin BCP Report
BCCP Coordinating Committee Meeting
August 1, 2015 – September 15, 2015

Program Administration

Acquisition

- The 10-acre Lucas tract was purchased for addition to the City BCP.

Personnel

- Willy Conrad retired from his position as Division Manager of the Wildland Conservation Division on August 31, 2015. Sherri Kuhl is acting BCCP Coordinating Committee Secretary and Kevin Thuesen is acting Wildlands Division Manager. Two positions will be filled and the BCCP Coordinating Committee Secretary will be jointly funded by the City of Austin and Travis County.

BCCP Infrastructure Training Workshop

- Scheduled for October 8, 2015, at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

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 awarded, with a start date of October 2015.
- BCCP Cave Substitution Policy was officially adopted by the BCCP Coordinating Committee on August 21, 2015. This new policy provides the groundwork for possible future substitutions for BCCP permit caves.
- Conducted cave faunal surveys and cave cricket exit counts (ongoing).
- Monitored 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.
- 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. Several significant caves have been opened including grassy cove cave which was recently gated. (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).

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?
 - Fifth year of data have been sent to USFS; work on the models is in progress.
- The following 3 publications are now available online:
 - Reidy, J., F. Thompson, C. Amundson, and L. O'Donnell. 2015. Landscape and local effects on occupancy and densities of an endangered wood-warbler in an urbanizing landscape. *Landscape Ecology*; DOI: 10.1007/s10980-015-0250-0.
 - Reidy, J., L. O'Donnell, and F. Thompson. 2015. Evaluation of a reproductive index for estimating songbird productivity: case study of the Golden-cheeked Warbler. *Wildlife Society Bulletin*; DOI: 10.1002/wsb.576.
 - O'Donnell, L., C. Farquhar, J. Hunt, K. Nesvacil, J. Reidy, W. Reiner, J. Scalise, and C. Warren. 2015. Density influences accuracy of model-based estimates for a forest songbird. *Journal of Field Ornithology*; DOI: 10.1111/jof.12116.

Black-capped Vireo (BCVI)

- 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; most surveys were postponed due to recent floods. (ongoing)
- BCP staff conducted a salamander survey in Testudo Tube, the survey area is a 100 meter transect, all salamanders were captured, measured and photographed with the goal of identifying individuals via this set of photos since each individual salamander has distinct markings on the dorsal side of head. The ability to identify individual salamanders will allow for a better understanding of the salamanders life history and future trends.

Bracted Twistflower

- Plans for fence to protect Bracted Twistflower at Mount Bonnell: see Dual-Managed Lands, below.

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 fence to protect bracted twistflower habitat and keep people off the bluff has been designed and construction will begin in the fall.
- PARD and BCP staffs worked 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

- 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. LCRA staff is currently addressing some erosion issues with guidance from BCP staff.
- 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. (ongoing)

Law Enforcement

- Homeless camps are an ongoing management challenge in the Barton Creek Greenbelt. City Wildland Conservation and PARD staffs continue to monitor these sites and remove camps as they are continue to break into the Lanier house and that structure is scheduled for demolition this fall.

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.

Oak Wilt

- BCP staff continued to monitor movement of the fungus in known oak wilt centers and success of control trenches.

Fencing Projects

- Bids for fence installation on the Jester and Cortaña tracts have been received and work is close to completion on the Jester game fence.
- Currently scoping surveys to fence the newly acquired Lucas tract, a portion of the Forest Ridge tract, Long Canyon, and Park West.

Fire Management

- Wildland Conservation Division (WCD) staffs have created a final draft of Wildfire Contingency Plan Maps for all WCD properties. These maps are intended to facilitate wildfire suppression on WCD property by illustrating access points, roads, structures, vegetation, and fire potential.
- WCD staff is currently planning additional potential shaded fuel break projects for the fall and winter.

TRAVIS COUNTY'S BCCP Activities Update: 1 August 2015 –30 September 2015

BCCP Administration	
Public Participation	Ten BCCP applications were received and processed; Two Participation Certificates were issued for a total of \$4,750.00 in mitigation payments. Fees were split 50:50 between Travis County and City of Austin.
Land Acquisition	The 500-acre Kotrla tract in northwest Travis County was acquired in July. This tract is connected to another 450-acre BCP tract and this combined area provides complete protection of the surface and subsurface drainage basins of the BCCP-listed Spanish Wells cave. This area also contains habitat for warblers, vireos, and a population of Texabama croton, a plant named for protection in the BCCP permit.
	Meetings have been held with the City of Jonestown to discuss City Council's concerns that the purchase of the 228-acre Plains Capital Tract for the BCP has negatively impacted anticipated revenue from development of a residential subdivision on that tract. The tract was purchased February 25, 2015.
Personnel	Four Natural Resources positions were filled during August and September. David Morier is the new Project Manager; Julie Murray and Blake Sissel are Natural Resources Specialists; and Travis Clark is the new Natural Resources Tech. Hiring is in the final stages for the vacant Environmental Specialist position. A Community Liaison position will be advertised in October.
Rare and Endangered Resources Management	
Golden-cheeked warbler and Black-capped vireo	Warblers and vireos have migrated south for the winter. Nesting season officially ended August 31 st .
Karst invertebrates	Summer season faunal surveys were performed at nine caves.
	Summer season cave cricket exit counts were performed at six caves.
	BCCP Cave Substitution Policy was adopted by the BCCP Coordinating Committee in August. This policy provides a process that allows caves listed in the BCCP permit to be substituted with other suitable caves in a manner that is transparent, science based, and consistent with the vision and intent established for BCCP.
Plant and Animal Control	
Feral hogs	Signs of hog damage were found on many BCP tracts. Traps were in operation on the Ribelin, Sam Hamilton, and Concordia tracts.
White-tailed deer	Spotlight deer surveys are scheduled for September and October. Deer harvest will begin in October.
Tawny crazy ants	Assessments and surveys of Tawny crazy ant infestation were conducted at Whirlpool and No Rent caves.

TRAVIS COUNTY'S BCCP Activities Update: 1 August 2015 –30 September 2015

Invasive Plants	Invasive plants (<i>Nandina</i> , Brazilian Vervain, and Asian jasmine) were removed from the Snowden tract.
Land Stewardship	
Fencing	Fencing projects are planned for this fall/winter on the Collins, Plains Capital, Scott and White, and Kotrla tracts.
Wildfire Preparedness	Fuel mitigation projects are planned for this fall/winter on the Steiner Ranch, Canyon Vista, Greenshores, Grandview Hills, and Concordia tracts.
	<p>FEMA has approved the final award for a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) project to mitigate wildfire in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) of the BCP using shaded fuel treatments. The grant project will begin upon receipt of an award notice from the Texas Division of Emergency Management.</p> <p>With or without the grant, plans are underway to begin several new wildfire mitigation projects in the BCP WUI after October 1, using funds approved by Commissioners Court in the Natural Resources Program budget.</p>
Infrastructure Corridor	LCRA conducted inspections and maintenance of the T-160 and T-161 transmission lines which run through the Steiner, Ribelin, and Lucas Tracts.
	An Infrastructure Workshop is scheduled for October 8 th at the Wildflower Center. This workshop is designed to help explain the significance of the BCP and provide guidance to infrastructure service providers that cross the BCP or that pass through endangered species habitat outside of the preserve.
Transportation	<p>The status of the following transportation projects have not changed since the last staff report:</p> <p>LISD is pursuing an individual ESA 10(A) permit for the proposed road project in the infrastructure corridor through Travis County Ribelin, Sam Hamilton East, and private 10(A) mitigation lands.</p> <p>Some traffic improvements have been made along RM 2222. Additional improvements involving RM2222 and RM 620 are still in development. There has been no recent discussion of the LISD's proposed new roadway.</p>

	<p>SH 45 SW: Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released January 23, 2015. The Record of Decision dated March 4th identified the Preferred Alternative as the Selected Alternative. See http://www.sh45sw.com/about/environment.php</p> <p>USFWS responded to letters from City and County elected officials re concerns. The future status of Flint Ridge Cave remains in question. Details of land management in the vicinity of FRC remain to be resolved. On April 21st the Travis County Commissioners Court directed staff to work with the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA) to include state-of-the-art stormwater controls for this area of extraordinary sensitivity; and to work with the CTRMA to require a sharing, by the CTRMA, of the risk of non-compliance under the Endangered Species Act.</p> <p>TNR staff are currently engaged in ongoing review of project plans. TNR staff are also participating in a number of technical working groups with CTRMA, City staff and other stakeholders to review and assess design plans, water quality controls, protection of Flint Ridge Cave and other related issues.</p> <p>Travis County commissioned a feasibility study for the realignment of Steiner Ranch Boulevard/Comanche Trail. The recommendation rejected any new encroachments on BCP and proposed potential new alignments, but these were contingent on the results of the TxDOT RM 620 Corridor Study which is still in progress.</p>
Adjacent Development	Staff coordinated with City of Austin and developers on current and future development projects adjacent to the Cuevas, Nootsie, The Crossings, and Steiner Ranch tracts. Staff is reviewing fire service road route options for the Travaasa development. The road will cross through The Crossings tract.
Law Enforcement	
Trespass and Criminal Mischief	<p>Four incidents of construction material dumping was discovered on the Cuevas and Plains Capital tracts; Vandalism (damage to PVC pipes) occurred on the Webb tract.</p> <p>A 0.3 acre area of tree clearing on the Gray Mountain conservation easement was observed in May. After negotiations, the owner has agreed to restore vegetation on the cleared area.</p>
Outreach/Volunteers	
Volunteers provided 80.5 hours of service to the Travis County BCP during August and September.	

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

BCCP CAC/SAC Meetings – August 22-23, 2015

Wildlife Surveys at Wheless

LCRA worked with an outside contractor to perform wildlife surveys to determine white-tailed deer population density, buck/doe ratio and fawn survival. A final report is in progress, which will include findings, visibility measurements and copies of completed data sheets for each survey attempt. Incidental observations of other species will be noted in the report.

Erosion Control Work on City of Austin (COA) 3M Preserve for LCRA T-160 Project

LCRA rebuilt the T-160 (Marshall Ford to McNeil) transmission line, which crosses several BCP lands. Concerns arose over erosion control on the 3M preserve that resulted from the construction of the transmission line. LCRA worked with City of Austin (COA) BCCP staff to finalize and implement an erosion control plan for this preserve. Implementation of the erosion control plan began in September 2015 and will continue until early October 2015. Some of the implemented erosion controls include gabion mattresses and berms where pad sites construction occurred (see photos below). Top soil from cave restoration work was removed from various locations in southwest Austin and will be used with a BCCP-approved seed mix from Native American Seed to help stabilize the pad sites. Road work will be conducted and multiple diversion berms created to assist in slowing sheet flow from rain events.



Westcave Preserve Land Management Activities

American Youth Works cut understory woody species in the future prairie area, in preparation for a USFWS prescribed burn. They also established prairie restoration area photo points.

Campers with El Ranchito Service Corps erected a bat box, removed Johnsongrass, and performed brush management on the uplands. The group also cut and treated Chaste Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*) directly above the waterfall in the upper creek.

Girl Scouts researched and developed laminated informational sheets on birds that can be seen in the area and built a wooden stand to hold the information sheets.

A dragonfly research study was conducted through Migratory Dragonfly Partnership for Citizen Scientists and has been set up in two places on the preserve and one at Hammett's Crossing. Westcave conservation staff will monitor monthly.

Salamander Survey conducted at Westcave with TPWD, Travis County and COA biologists. Biologists found no salamanders on the preserve, but found a unique species at Reimers Ranch. Staff conducted an additional survey but no salamanders were observed.

General trail maintenance and boundary inspections were conducted as well as an endemic plant survey. Westcave staff is preparing for the avian population monitoring project to be conducted by Dawn Houston, a member of the Conservation Committee. The project includes conducting avian point counts throughout the Preserve to monitor population and trends.

Illegal Dumping

An LCRA Transmission Line crew was inspecting the T-142 (Hi Cross to Marshall Ford) transmission line. This line crosses several BCPs. The crew discovered illegal dumping in the transmission line easement at the edge of the Barton Creek Park. LCRA reported the dumping to COA BCCP biologist who informed LCRA that the information was given to staff in the COA Parks and Recreation Department, as they are technically the owners at the location where the dumping occurred.



Exotic Plants on Wheless

Update: COA biologists plan to meet with LCRA between October and December 2015 to flag and discuss the management of exotic plant species.

In June 2015, COA Endangered Species Biologist completed a helicopter survey of the BCP and informed LCRA that no oak wilt was observed on the Wheless Preserve, but they did find some Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). 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).



BALCONES CANYONLANDS PRESERVE

PARTNER EDUCATION SUMMARY

August 1 -September 15, 2015



- City of Austin staff hosted a volunteer CPR/First Aid training for volunteers that lead projects independently on BCP properties.
- Staff is starting to plan a BCCP 20th Anniversary Event.
- Upcoming events include the BCCP Infrastructure Workshop 10/8 8am-12:30pm
 - <http://2015bccpworkshop.eventbrite.com>

Guided Hikes			
DATE	ACTIVITY	# PARTICIPANTS	PARTNER
8/8/2015	2nd SAT. Guided Hikes	15	WBSN BCP
9/12/2015	2nd SAT. Guided Hikes	12	WBSN BCP
8/22/2015	TAS Bird Hike	16	TAS BCP
9/14/2015	Sun City Hiking Club	19	TAS BCP
8/8/2015	2nd SAT. Guided Hikes	15	WBSN BCP
9/12/2015	2nd SAT. Guided Hikes	12	WBSN BCP
8/22/2015	TAS Bird Hike	16	TAS BCP
2015 Summer QTR. YOUTH EDU PARTICIPANT TOTAL:		105	
YEAR TO DATE YOUTH EDU PARTICIPANT TOTAL:		3069	

BCP HIKE AND LECTURE SERIES			
DATE	ACTIVITY	# PARTICIPANTS	PARTNER
8/1/2015	Flint Knapping	10	WBSN BCP
8/5/2015	Night Hike at Sam Hamilton	10	COA BCP
9/5/2015	Spider Joe	14	WBSN BCP
2015 Summer QTR. HIKE AND LECTURE PARTICIPANT TOTAL:		34	
YEAR TO DATE HIKE AND LECTURE PARTICIPANT TOTAL:		199	

BCP gains valuable help completing tasks with the help of numerous volunteers. Below is a summary of volunteer activities from August 1st through August 15th. Tracking volunteer hours includes updates and additions after the printing of this report. The most up-to-date volunteer hours will be available in the year-end report.

Volunteer Summary			
			Total Vol. Hours
August	Weekly volunteer stewardship group (sum for Aug)	6	WB BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Collecting Veg plot data	42.5	TAS BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Facilities Maintenance	4	TAS BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Trail Maintenance	7	TAS BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Grounds Maintenance	1.5	TAS BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Habitat Restoration	13	TAS BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Invasive Plant Removal	9	TAS BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Travis County Volunteer Projects	80.5	TC BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Land Stewardship Days at the Vireo Preserve	84	COA BCP
Aug 1-Sept 15	Tree Mulching	8	COA BCP
8/8/2015	CPR and First Aid for Volunteers	36	COA BCP
8/22/2015	Saturday stewardship day (Aug)	60	WB BCP
8/31/2015	Pollinator Garden and Tree Mulching Project	164	COA BCP
9/17/2015	Weekly volunteer stewardship group (sum thru Sept 17)	6	WB BCP
2015 Late Summer QTR. VOL ACTIVITIES TOTALS:		2, 204	
VOLUNTEER Late Summer QTR. COST SAVINGS VALUE (\$22.14/hr.): \$		\$48, 807	