

City of Austin BCP Report
BCCP Coordinating Committee Meeting
September 15, 2015 – February 1, 2016

Program Administration

Personnel

- Willy Conrad retired from his position as Division Manager and BCCP Coordinating Committee Secretary 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. The Division Manager position was posted on November 24, 2015 and closed on January 6, 2016. The BCCP Coordinating Committee Secretary will be jointly funded by the City of Austin and Travis County, and will be filled once the Division Manager has been hired.
- We hired four seasonal biologists in February 2016 to help with avian monitoring and habitat restoration.

Permits

- The BCP annual report was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in January.
- Annual scientific permit reports were submitted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in December 2015.

Biological Monitoring

Karst

- 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 were unstable, leading to large amounts of sediment washing into the aquifer. To date the restoration project has stabilized these features, thus improving water quality to Barton Springs. This project is nearing completion; the final phase will include touch-up rock work on three of the features as well as revegetation work and a new perimeter fence to help prevent ongoing trespass issues.
- 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. To date several significant caves have been opened including grassy cove cave, LaCrosse, hideout, and Wade cave, all of which were recently gated and now open to educational guided tours. (ongoing)
- Cave public access: A cave collaboration group of City staff from AWU, PARD, WPD, along with volunteers held two training events for cave tour guides. The goal was to devise a permitting process to certify that all individuals leading cave tours are properly trained to lead cave tours, once the applicants successfully completed the program (including an online test); they were certified as “cave tour guides”. The training emphasis was on why caves and cave fauna are important, how to minimize impacts, and how to be good stewards of our caves. (ongoing).
- Restoration and monitoring efforts continue to be implemented at two endangered species caves located in the courtyard at McNeil High. McNeil High School science teacher Tina Vick and City and Travis County BCP staff are leading the restoration and monitoring efforts along with guidance from USFWS personnel. Travis County and City BCP staff are currently conducting cave faunal surveys and Tina Vick and students continue to conduct cave cricket exit counts with the ultimate goal of improving habitat for cave crickets and document the progress of this endeavor. Another major goal is to make this courtyard an outdoor education classroom to encourage more student participation for long term monitoring and potential research projects that will benefit the listed species. City BCP staff also held a volunteer clean up removing most of the remaining trash from the caves as well as a student volunteer revegetation effort planting, mulching, and fencing an additional 50 trees and shrubs, many of which provide forage for cave crickets (ongoing).
- Conducted cave faunal surveys and cave cricket exit counts (ongoing).
- Monitored cave conditions, removing trash, and treating for red-imported fire ants (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?
 - Work on the models is in progress.
- BCP and USFS gave presentations on GCWA research and related topics at the 2016 GCWA and BCVI Symposium (January 28 and 29, 2016).

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. (ongoing)
- BCP staff conducted a salamander survey in Testudo Tube. 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. (ongoing)

Bracted Twistflower

- Fencing installed at Mount Bonnell to protect Bracted Twistflower: see Dual-Managed Lands, below.
- Communicating with Bracted Twistflower Working Group to plan and organize surveys of all known sites for 2016 season. This is expected to be a good year for Twistflowers due to the wet late fall/early winter followed by the mild winter weather. At least 21 seedlings were found at Mount Bonnell in December.

Preserve Management

Dual-Managed Lands

- AWU had meetings with PARD, Watershed Protection Department, stakeholders, and Commissioner Daugherty in December 2015 to discuss trail sustainability and protecting Connors Creek within Emma Long Motocross Park.
- The proposed Mount Bonnell fence to protect bracted twistflower habitat and keep people off the bluff has been built.
- 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.

Habitat Restoration

- During September and October 2015, staff monitored 3600 shin oak acorns planted in November 2013 on the Sam Hamilton tract under dead and live Ashe junipers and in open areas as part of a germination/survival study. Results continue to document highest germination and survival under live canopy and lowest in the open areas.

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 successfully completed restoration work regarding 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 work with APD to remove camps as they are found.
- Trespassing individuals continue to break into the Lanier house and that structure is scheduled for demolition this month.

Invasive Species/Animal Management

- Tawny Crazy Ants: Staff from the University of Texas at Austin, Travis County, and City BCP staff initiated work on the Section 6 tawny crazy ant research. Ed LeBrun hired technicians to help City and Travis County staff on the research and monitoring efforts. (ongoing)
- BCP staff is continuing efforts to remove non-native plants on COA BCP tracts. (ongoing)
- BCP staff is actively removing feral hogs. (ongoing)
- BCP staff conducted white-tailed deer management on several City BCP tracts.
- During December and January 2016, monitored Japanese ligustrum logs and stumps that COA staff inoculated with native Turkey Tail mushroom spawn in February and March 2015 on two COA BCP tracts. Preliminary results indicate inoculation with this medicinal mushroom speeds up decomposition of the logs. COA plan to conduct similar tests with ligustrum mulch. The purpose of this project is to help break down slash generated by invasive plant species to aid with restoration efforts.

Oak Wilt

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

Fencing Projects

- Currently conducting surveys to fence the newly acquired Lucas tract, a portion of the Forest Ridge tract, Long Canyon, and Park West.
- Pre-bid will be held this month for fence installation on the Bohls Jr. tract.

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.
- Austin Fire Department Fuels Crew initiated efforts to reduce fuels on Jester preserve in close proximity to Jester Estates residents. The goal is to reduce the threat of possible future wildfires following the specifications contained in the document "City of Austin Fuel Treatments in Juniper and Juniper-Oak Woodlands Best Management Practices within the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve".