

City of Austin BCP Report
BCCP Coordinating Committee Meeting
August 1, 2016 – October 15, 2016

Program Administration

Personnel

- Nico Hauwert is scheduled to begin as the new BCP Program Manager on October 31, 2016. Amanda Ross, Wildlands Outreach Coordinator, started in her new position as Division Manager with the Parks and Recreation Department on September 19, 2016. The Outreach Coordinator and GIS positions will be filled in the next few months.

Biological Monitoring

Karst

- BCP staff prepared a cave video that includes footage inside Midnight Cave and is posted on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTbS4bPlugE>.
- 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 staffs 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 documenting 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. (ongoing)
- Conducted cave faunal surveys and cave cricket exit counts. (ongoing)
- Watershed hydrogeologists are conducting phase 2 of the Flintridge subsurface drainage basin delineation study, a critical study to determine potential future impacts if SH45 is constructed.

Black-capped Vireo (BCVI) and Golden-Cheeked Warbler (GCWA)

- Staff has entered data for the 2016 field season and is beginning to prepare annual reports.
- Over 40 volunteers devoted more than 900 field hours this past spring to searching for banded GCWAs as part of the USFS project. (See also Outreach and Education section below.)
- 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?
 - Ms. Reidy and Frank Thompson are working with BCP staff on three manuscripts summarizing the results of the study.

Jollyville Plateau Salamander (JPS)

- COA BCP staff worked with Watershed staff on prioritizing future sites that need to be surveyed for the presence of JP salamanders. (ongoing)

Bracted Twistflower

- 2016 Bracted Twistflower survey data (including plant numbers, locations, and survey areas) were entered, QAQC'd, and submitted to TPWD staff for entry into the TXNDD (Texas Natural Diversity Database).

Preserve Management

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. This project is nearing completion; the current focus is maintaining recently planted vegetation around each restored feature. The vegetation will reduce sediment runoff and enhance habitat for cave crickets. The final phase includes a new perimeter fence which is currently under construction; the fence will help prevent ongoing trespass and vandalism 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. LaCross and Hideout caves are now open to educational guided tours (Grassy Cove looks very promising, but Wade cave will be difficult to bring group to due to a steep drop inside the cave). (ongoing)
- Monitored cave conditions, removing trash, and treating for red-imported fire ants. (ongoing)

Dual-Managed Lands

- Barton Creek transient camps: see Law Enforcement below.

Law Enforcement

- Transient camps are an ongoing management challenge in the Barton Creek Greenbelt and Wilderness. City Wildland Conservation and PARD staffs continue to monitor these sites. They work with APD to remove camps as they are found, and then clean up the large amounts of trash left behind.
- WCD and PARD staffs plan an extensive clean-up of abandoned camps and trash dumps in October.

Invasive Species/Animal Management

- BCP staff is working with Animal Services, PARD, AFD, and other BCP partners to help develop and implement a Wild Neighbors program, which will include education and outreach for Austin citizens living along the wildland-urban interface.
- BCP staff worked with AgriLife Extension to update a brochure on the Tawny Crazy Ant. (The brochure is now available.)
- Tawny Crazy Ants: Staff from the University of Texas at Austin, Travis County, and City BCP continue to 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 and volunteers are continuing efforts to remove non-native plants on COA BCP tracts. (ongoing)
- BCP staff are actively removing feral hogs. (ongoing)

Oak Wilt

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

Fire Management

- Austin Fire Dept., with assistance from WCD and PARD staff, began fuel mitigation in the head of a tributary canyon upstream of the Barton Creek Wilderness, in the vicinity of Lost Creek Boulevard. Much of the work also involves removal of non-native, invasive trees and shrubs.
- WCD and BCP staff have worked with the Austin Fire Dept. Wildfire Division to identify and plan locations where shaded fuel break projects can be implemented to reduce the chance of wildfire spreading from one side of the wildland-urban interface to the other.

- On August 14th, WCD staff met with representatives from Travis County BCP, and local fire departments to discuss standardized contingency planning and mapping practices to prepare for future wildfire response.
- On August 22nd, WCD staff attended informational sessions and provided comments on the results of a grant funded study by Headwaters Economics that provides wildfire protection recommendations for the City's Code Next process. Participation will continue through the code adoption process.
- On August 30th, WCD and BCP staff met with representatives from Travis County and USFWS to initiate a revision of the fire chapter of the BCP land management plan. Standardization of wildfire hazard fuels best management practices is also ongoing.
- On September 7th, WCD staff attended a meeting of the State Prescribed Burning Board to provide comments on training standards.

Habitat Restoration

- BCP staff and volunteers are continuing to implement restoration projects at the Vireo Preserve and JJ&T tracts 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 and JJ&T support many of the habitat types observed throughout the BCP, lessons learned from restoration work at these sites should be applicable to other areas within the BCP. (ongoing)

Outreach and Education

- The BCP 20th Anniversary was celebrated by members of the community, a representative from USFWS, and local government officials and staff. The successes of the BCP were shared in several forms:
 - The anniversary was highlighted in a Community Impact article explaining the habitat conservation plan
 - Staff produced a timeline showing history of the plan
 - The Midnight Cave video mentioned above was produced to highlight the karst species of the BCCP.
- A BCP Land Steward training and volunteer program began this year on Forest Ridge. Volunteers regularly remove invasive plants and conduct light trail repairs under the guidance of staff.
- The public experienced the BCP on 36 guided hikes led by volunteers and staff on the preserve.
- Staff provided 22 school presentation and field trips focused on the BCP.
- This year saw the most GCWA re-sighting volunteers ever – more than 40 individuals helped in the effort.
- The Friends of the BCP MeetUp group, used to advertise public hikes and lectures, grew to 1,600 people this year. Also, volunteers are now able to record their service electronically in a new database system for hikes and workdays.
- Staff and volunteers hosted more than 30 habitat restoration workdays on the BCP.