



Record of Decisions

Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan Coordinating Committee

Thursday April 26, 2007 10:30 AM to 12:00 Noon
Travis County Commissioners Court Room
314 W. 11th Street, 1st Floor
Austin, Texas

ACTION ITEMS

1. **Approve Record of Decisions for 2/7/07 meeting.** – Approved on a motion from Member Daugherty, Second Chair Wynn, Carried 2/0
2. **Take action on revised BCP Land Management Plans** – Member Daugherty made a motion directing staff to present the plans and brief members about the plans at a called meeting soon, on a date to be determined. Members will solicit and receive comments from the public at this meeting and potentially take action. Member Pine asked the other members to be sure to involve US Fish and Wildlife Service because any action that would result in the permittees exceeding their authorized take would require a major amendment of the BCCP federal permit. Second by Chair Wynn, carried 2/0
3. **Take action regarding fees for BCCP Participation Certificate fees.** – Member Daugherty made a motion to approve the Citizens Advisory Committee recommendation. Second by Chair Wynn, carried 2/0
4. **Take actions on recommendations from advisory committees.** – Members set a hearing regarding Land management plans in Action item 1 (CAC), no action regarding SAC recommendations regarding public access. Member Daugherty asked for a staff briefing about how listing of Jollyvilleau Plateau salamander would affect Water Treatment Plant 4, adopted CAC recommendations regarding Participation Certificate fees under action item 3.
5. **Take action on recommendations by the Turkey Creek Task Force.** – Because of an apparent lack of consensus between stakeholders, members took no action on this item. However, they recommended resuming the stakeholder process to seek consensus and possibly submitting a proposal through the expected Public Access Application process expected in the revised land management plans.

CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS

Beth Picker – spoke as a member of Friends of Turkey Creek. She has been using the Turkey Creek Trail for three years with her dog and is enchanted by the area. She has not observed abusive users and has observed that all dogs stay on the trail. This site strikes a good balance between birds and dogs. She supports the stakeholder process that was used, and suggests it be used from now on. She closed by thanking parks and recreation for initiating this process.

Chris Morris – is a member of Friends of Turkey Creek and sent emails to members thanking them for the stakeholder group. He supports public access and thanks PARD for being inclusive. He asked members to keep the trail open, increase its length, and include the stakeholder recommendations in the revised land management plan.

Sheila Holbrook-White – spoke on behalf of herself and three others. She asked members to support the results of the stakeholder process. She described this process as a model for decisions on other grandfathered sites. She asked members to develop numerical data on status of protected birds. She advised members that Friends of Turkey Creek will help find funding to further public access at this site. She asked members to add the results of the stakeholder process to the revised land management plans.

Glen Hall Sr. – spoke as a member of Friends of Turkey Creek. They conducted a work day at the trail last Saturday that benefited the trail. He described original disputes about habitat damage at the trail as unfounded. He also disputed the staff report that consensus was reached for seasonal closing of a segment of the trail during nesting season. Friends of Turkey Creek did not join a consensus for seasonal closure. He said that enough golden-cheeked warbler habitat is protected by BCP that losing 28 acres at the Turkey Creek site would have no effect on the warblers.

Glen Hall Jr. - he supports recreation. If adverse effects can truly be demonstrated then change it. He thanked Commissioner Daugherty for his commitment to public participation and urged him to keep public access decisions at the Coordinating Committee level. He described how the habitat conservation plan grandfathered uses on many sites. As changes were proposed for Turkey Creek stakeholder members had repeatedly asked for hard data demonstrating the negative effects and never received it. He said that concerns about effects on golden-cheeked warblers at Turkey Creek are not supported by data. He reiterated that recent BCP policy decisions regarding public access at Turkey Creek are contrary to the habitat conservation plan and asked the committee to assure public participation for changes in access policies on grandfathered tracts. He also asked members that references eliminating leash free status at Turkey Creek in the old and revised land management plans be voided.

Scot Sheppard – addressed the committee as a member of the Turkey Creek Stakeholder group. He said that staff needs to provide evidence that the trail is harmful to birds. He said decreasing access will not benefit birds if there is no evidence that access is harmful to begin with. He recommended that a stakeholder process be used for the Canyon Vista tract and asked that Sheila Holbrook-White participate in that process.

Gary Rochelle – spoke as a representative of the Sherwood Hill Home owners Association. He supported the recommendation of the Turkey Creek task force as a way that recreation, dog, and golden-cheeked warblers can coexist. As read the Friends of Canyon Vista public access proposal into the record. He challenged the Scientific Advisory Committee to provide any scientific evidence supporting that closing public access will benefit golden-cheeked warblers.

ADD TO RECORD CITIZENS COMMENTS BY
GARY ROCHELLE.

A Proposal to Demonstrate Responsible Public Access to the Canyon Vista Tract

By

The Friends of Canyon Vista

Gary Rochelle, Representative of Spicewood Hills Neighborhood
Scott Shepherd, Resident, D-K Ranch Road
Bill Zeitz, Resident, Dominion at Great Hills
Desmond DSouza, Resident, Canyon Mesa
Chi-Hung Yip, Resident, Canyon Mesa
Skip Cameron, Bull Creek Foundation
Hill Abell, Bicycle Sport Shop, IMBA

Submitted to the Citizens Advisory Committee on March 6, 2006

Revised and submitted to the BCP Coordinating Committee on April 26, 2007

Introduction

The 238 acre Canyon Vista tract of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) was acquired by Travis County in July 2004. This property has been fenced with the intent of excluding any significant public access. This is a proposal to demonstrate responsible public access to this tract implemented by a public/private coalition.

The BCP was established and funded to address the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and provide "open space for passive public use" (Proposition 10). In 1999, the Scientific Advisory Committee suggested that BCP preserve lands can be available for public recreational opportunities during the non-nesting season for the Golden-cheeked warbler (GCWa) ... without adversely affecting these species as long as those recreational activities do not result in any significant land or vegetational modifications." Therefore this proposal seeks to protect the golden-cheeked warbler and to provide responsible public access for hikers, dogs, and mountain bikers during the non-nesting season. The proposal also seeks a commitment to provide responsible access during the nesting season in a later phase of the demonstration.

Responsible Coalition

The demonstration shall be implemented by an effective, responsible public/private coalition.

The Friends of Canyon Vista shall manage the demonstration, patrol for rules enforcement, and report on its success.

Travis County shall provide BCP managers to monitor GCWa population and train registered users.

The neighbors of the tract (RRISD and 3 HOA's) shall participate in plans for responsible parking and access.

Recreational businesses (REI, Bicycle Sport Shop) shall provide financial support.

The Austin Parks Foundation shall be the legal entity for money management.

Trained Volunteers shall be provided for trail upgrading and maintenance by the Austin Ridge Riders, the Friends of Canyon Vista and others such as the Central Texas Trail Tamers and the Boy Scouts.

Responsible Use

Responsible use will provide public access with no threat to the welfare of the endangered species and no degradation of soil, vegetation, or water resources. The Friends of Canyon Vista shall monitor and report on trail access and use. Regular trail patrols, peer pressure, and responsible reporting will enforce rules for access, parking, and responsible use. A network of single track trails shall be established on preexisting, sustainable routes without erosion or impact on the canopy. Trained users and volunteers shall maintain the trails with accepted standards, revegetate compacted surface not required for trails, and keep the preserve clean. Volunteer trainers shall educate users and students on an interpretive trail.

Responsible, increasing use by hikers, hikers with dogs, and mountain bikers

The level of public access during the non-nesting season will be increased by progressive relaxation of access controls. In the first season access will be limited to registered users by use of a gate with a combination lock. In the next season the gates will be opened for limited periods of time. In the third season the gates will be opened 7 days a week during the non-nesting season. "If monitoring..of. strategies on a given preserve tract ..are demonstrated to be effective, public uses...[will] be increased." The coalition will develop a proposal to provide responsible public access during the nesting season in the fourth year.

Responsible Science

It is reasonable that trail use during the non-nesting season will have no effect on the golden-cheeked warbler. There are no other significant endangered species in the Canyon Vista Preserve. The BCP Monitoring results at Forest Ridge confirm that there is no impact of unoccupied trails on the population of the GCWa. The effect of trail use on vegetation will be measured and limited. It is not the objective of the BCP to protect other species or to preserve the habitat in its undisturbed natural state. Therefore it is responsible science to provide access for hikers, dogs, and mountain bikers during the non-nesting season.

Monitoring results at Emma Long, St. Edwards, BLORA, and Hamilton Pool suggest that there is no impact of trails used by hikers, dogs, or bikes on the GCWa. Therefore it is responsible science to commit to the preparation of a proposal for access during the nesting season.

Responsible Results

In each access season, quantifiable results will be reported on the state of the tract.

Travis County will enumerate GCWa territories to verify a stable population (19±3).

Surface compaction by trails will be measured annually by the coalition and maintained at less than 2% of the tract. Total canopy and vegetation cover on the tract will be increased by revegetation.

The number of user hours will be estimated and reported by the Friends of Canyon Vista.

The number of students and visitors educated will be reported by the Friends of Canyon Vista.

Each year there will be one full sweep to remove trash from the tract.