

**Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP)
Updates for McGregor and Westcave Preserves**

**Q2 Report
January – March 2020**

McGregor Preserve

On February 25, 2020, Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) Contractors installed the junction pole “new pole” necessary for the reroute from the McGregor Tract over Lake Perspectives Preserve as part of PEC’s Bullick Hollow Project. The “existing pole” on the McGregor Preserve will be removed after the breeding season for the federally listed endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Westcave Preserve Land Management Activities

Westcave held first Heinz Branch Watershed meeting of landowners within our shared watershed. Board Members from all three groundwater conservation districts in Hays, Travis and Blanco County attended. The watershed is comprised within these three counties.

Three volunteer workdays were held. Two were with local schools (Bee Cave Middle School and Dripping Springs High School). Over 40 students worked on removing non-native plants and weeded gardens. The third workday was a conservation workday comprised of six adult volunteers who weeded, mulched and planted the Ahrns Grove.

The preserve was closed to the public on March 17, 2020 due to COVID – 19.

Research consisted of:

- (1) FeederWatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology Citizen Scientist program), which started in November 2019 and will end in April 2020. This includes bi-weekly monitoring by volunteers and staff of birds on the feeders at Leif’s Bird Blind.
- 2) Pond Watch (Xerxes Society Citizen Scientist program), which consists of monthly dragonfly surveys conducted by a core group of volunteers. No species of dragonfly were observed.
- (3) Monthly water quality sample testing was conducted at the grotto and at Hammetts crossing were submitted to LCRA Colorado River Watch Network (CRWN) and all results were within normal ranges.
- (4) Seasonal dung beetle research continues by Texas State University PhD candidate, Andy Pinon and current Westcave conservation interns.
- (5) Westcave participated in Audubon’s Great Backyard Bird Count on February 13, 2020.
- (6) Golden-cheeked Warbler surveys began in March. Two territories were detected during the March surveys. Surveys will continue into the breeding season.
- (7) Nestwatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) began in March and about four nest boxes had nests.

Note that starting on March 17, 2020 research programs were postponed due to COVID -19, with the exception of Golden-cheeked Warbler surveys, water quality testing, and dung beetle research.

Preserve maintenance is on-going and includes: trail inspections, trail work, view shed clearing, painting chimney swift tower, move purple martin house, nest box maintenance, tree trimming, bird blind maintenance and supplemental watering for butterfly gardens.

Spring programming this quarter included a roundtable social (CPR/Stop the Bleed) attended by twelve neighbors. All other spring programs have been canceled due to COVID -19.

Other Information

LCRA conducted routine reshredding, hydro mulching, and tree trimming within the existing T142 (HiCross to Marshall Ford) transmission line corridor within the COA Cortaña preserve as well as within the T626 and T161 (Marshall Ford to McNeil) transmission line corridors which passes through multiple Balcones Canyonlands Preserves (BCPs) located between RR620 and Spicewood Springs Road. Reshredding, hydro mulching, and tree trimming included a crew using a hydro axe tractor with an attached mower/shredder to shred and mulch and a crew using a bucket truck to trim back regrowth along the existing 20-foot cleared path. Reshredding and hydro mulching occurred next to gates (to ensure they could be opened) and around existing structures (20 to 50 feet). The only vegetation trimmed was woody vegetation that had re-grown in the space around the structures, near gates, and along the existing access roads. The existing access roads were cleared to have a 20 by 20 foot clearance. The width and height varied to ensure proper pruning cuts were conducted and mature trees not removed. This work was approved by the tract managers.