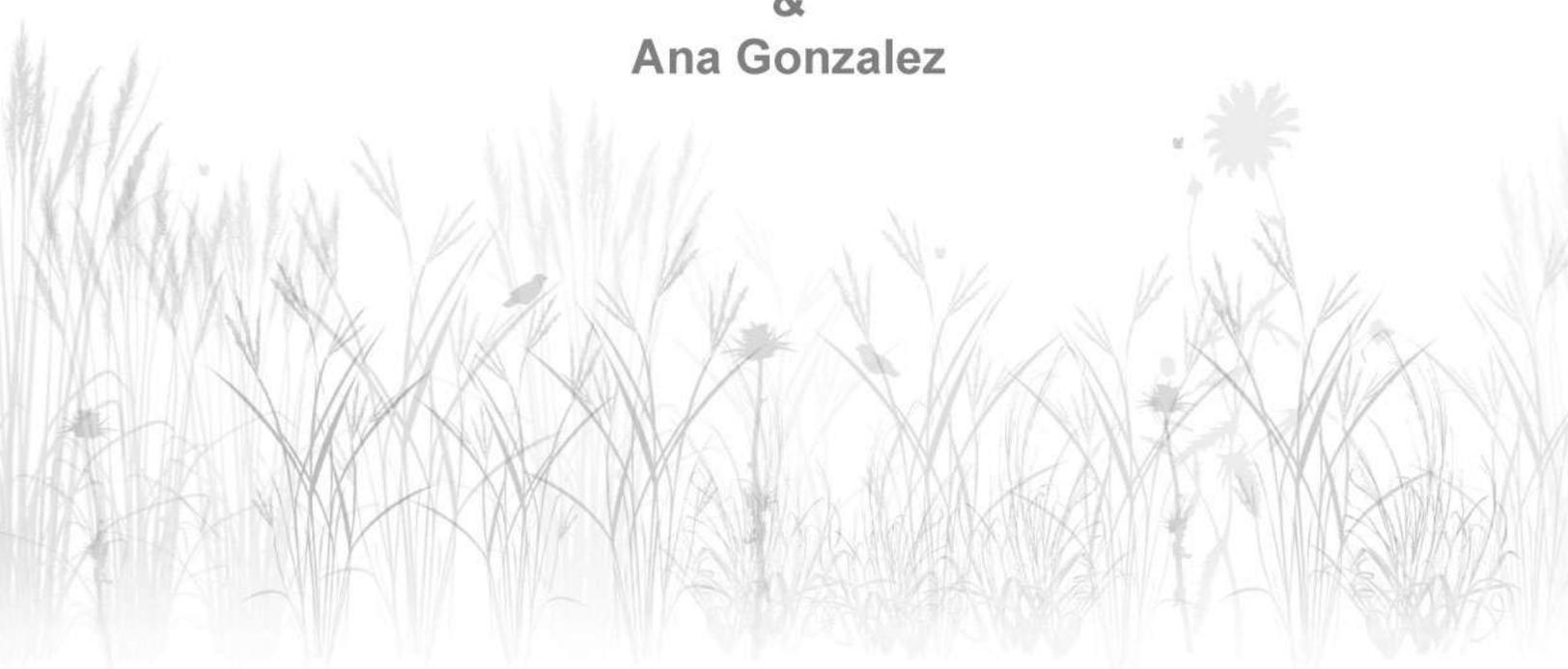




**DECKER TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE
&
INDIANGRASS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This document outlines a five-year management plan to initiate the long-term restoration of Blackland Prairie in Decker Tallgrass Prairie Preserve (DTPP) and Indiangrass Wildlife Sanctuary (IWS), located within Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park.

Restoring DTPP and IWS as Blackland Prairie nature preserves, in line with PARD's Long Range Plans for Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park, will create a natural heritage symbol representing the quality of life envisioned in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. Blackland Prairie, a rare and endangered ecological ecosystem, will be the identifying central feature in East Austin. In addition, it will provide valuable mitigation opportunities for projected development in East Austin.

In 2009, Austin Energy (AE) and the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) signed a memorandum of understanding creating DTPP "to restore the original Blackland Prairie habitat as an educational preserve and a research area for climate protection." This agreement provided funding for a vegetation study and management plan to restore Blackland Prairie in DTPP and IWS. Staff members from AE, PARD, Watershed Protection Department, and Austin Water Utility served as an advisory group for plan development.

This Blackland Prairie restoration management plan directly addresses priorities and needs identified by the City of Austin's PARD Long Range Plan, PARD Climate Protection Plan, and AE Climate Protection Plan. Implementation of this plan protects and preserves a unique ecological feature as mandated by City Code.

Blackland Prairie

Blackland Prairie is a tallgrass grassland, historically influenced by fire and grazing, that supports a diverse wildlife community. It is the most altered ecoregion in Texas and only about 1% of Blackland Prairie remains. Blackland Prairie has been identified as high priority conservation by PARD, Travis County, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, World Wildlife Fund, and other organizations.

Restoration Benefits

Environmental benefits of restoring Blackland Prairie include increasing native species diversity, reducing invasive exotic species and woody plant encroachment, and improving habitat quality for prairie wildlife species, some which are of conservation concern.

Educational and research opportunities in ecological restoration, invasive species control, and species monitoring for local schools, universities, and organizations can continue and expand.

Implementing this plan creates a best practices blueprint for Blackland Prairie restoration in high priority areas identified in PARD's Long Range Plan.

Additional benefits include reducing the risk of fire escaping into the Decker Creek Power Station, providing training opportunities for firefighters and land managers, and integrating partnerships among City of Austin departments.

Management Practices

The vegetation study has identified the extended invasion of the exotic King Ranch bluestem grass and woody plant encroachment as the most relevant restoration challenges in DTPP and IWS. Blackland Prairie restoration implies the need for long-term implementation of a disturbance regime adapted to overcome these challenges.

This management plan discusses the application of prescribed burns, reseeding, grazing, and other treatments. However, it does not represent a static approach to restoration but rather a guiding reference. Management practices will be monitored for effectiveness and adjusted to changing conditions.

Implementation and Funding

Adequate implementation of long-term ecological restoration in PARD's nature preserves will depend on adaptive management evaluated by degreed professionals with environmental science knowledge. Public administration, education and outreach will be critical for successful community involvement. The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve staffing structure offers a model that should be considered.

Potential short-term funding for this five-year management plan will be provided by AE and/or additional grants. We recommend assigning personnel responsible for writing and submitting grant applications for this plan.

However, long-term management will require securing permanent funding. Funding should be established through a proven vehicle such as a trust account or conservancy reinforced through a restrictive covenant. One funding mechanism to consider is mitigation banking.