

# **BALCONES CANYONLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN**

## **Annual Report**

**FY 2012**

(October 1, 2011 – Sept. 30, 2012)

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Background**

On May 2, 1996 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) issued a regional permit referred to as the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) to the City of Austin and Travis County (Permit Holders). The thirty-year permit covers most of western Travis County for incidental “take” of eight endangered species and 27 species of concern. The plan also mitigates the Permit Holders for capital improvement and infrastructure development needs and provides landowners and agencies a streamlined alternative process for compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

#### **Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Status**

Under the terms of the permit, the Permit Holders established the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) to set aside and manage a minimum of 30,428 acres of habitat for two endangered bird species (the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo). The Permit Holders also agreed to manage populations of two rare plants (Texabama croton and canyon mock-orange), and protect a total of 62 karst features known to contain populations of six endangered karst invertebrates and other rare karst invertebrates. In the 16 years since the permit’s inception, 30,438 acres of habitat have been protected (as of FY12). Populations of covered plant species are being managed to the terms of the permit, and 47 of 62 karst features have received some level of protection. Additionally, 12 karst features, which were not included on the permit, contain endangered species and are protected within the BCP.

#### **Plan Administration**

The City and the County administer the BCCP mitigation process that links habitat protection with development. The City of Austin manages the BCCP capital improvement and infrastructure development process and maintains a mitigation credit accounting system for participating agencies. Travis County administers the Public Participation Process that relays information related to development activity to USFWS and issues Participation Certificates to cooperating landowners. Nine Participation Certificates were issued in FY12, generating \$345,475 utilized in BCP land acquisition and preserve management and operation efforts.

### **Preserve Acquisition and Management Expenditures**

Travis County purchased 428.305 acres in FY12, and continued negotiations to acquire remaining key tracts within the Preserve system. The City of Austin did not acquire any new tracts in FY12. Travis County expended \$20,578,743.99 on land acquisition activities in FY12. The Permit Holders and cooperating entities expended a combined total of \$2,118,441 for operations and maintenance of Preserve lands in FY12.

### **Public Use and Habitat Management**

Public uses permitted on selected tracts prior to the establishment of the BCP continued through FY12. Other BCP tracts were available to the public through a number of education and outreach programs presented by the Permit Holders and co-operating entities. Habitat management activities on the Preserve included boundary delineation and fence construction, patrols by law enforcement staff, habitat restoration and monitoring, control of non-native and invasive plant and animal species, and continuing scientific data collection.

### **Research**

Research and monitoring efforts for species covered by the BCCP continued in FY12. Ongoing studies on the BCP include: monitoring of golden-cheeked warblers on a series of 100-acre study plots throughout the BCP; black-capped vireo distribution, abundance, and productivity monitoring; faunal surveys of protected karst features; and Jollyville plateau salamander population monitoring. In addition to research and monitoring activities conducted by the Permit Holders, several universities, agencies and individuals also conducted research on the BCP after being issued Scientific Research Permits by the City of Austin and/or Travis County. Some of the subjects that these researchers covered in their studies include rare plants, water quality monitoring, tree mortality, and Jollyville plateau salamander, golden-cheeked warbler, and invertebrate surveys.