

Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan

Annual Report FY 2015

(October 1, 2014 – Sept. 30, 2015)

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 30-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 specific karst features known to contain populations of six endangered karst invertebrates and other rare karst invertebrates. In the 19 years since the permit’s inception, 31,785 acres of golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo habitat have been protected. Populations of covered plant species are being managed to the terms of the permit, and 48 of 62 karst features have received some level of protection. Additionally, 13 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 issues Participation Certificates to cooperating landowners and relays information related to development activity to USFWS. Sixteen Participation

Certificates were issued in Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15), generating \$530,675 utilized in BCP land acquisition, preserve management, and operation efforts.

Preserve Acquisition and Management Expenditures

Travis County acquired six tracts totaling 1200.7 acres in FY15. In addition, 675 acres of the Travis Audubon Baker Sanctuary were protected in perpetuity through a conservation easement purchased by Travis County. The City of Austin acquired one new tract totaling 10.1 acres in FY15. The Permit Holders and cooperating entities expended a combined total of \$2,725,625 for operations and maintenance of Preserve lands in FY15.

Public Use and Habitat Management

Public uses permitted on selected tracts prior to the establishment of the BCP continued through FY15. Other BCP tracts were available to the public through a number of education and outreach programs presented by the Permit Holders and cooperating entities. Habitat management activities on the BCP 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 FY15. Ongoing studies on the BCP include: monitoring of golden-cheeked warblers on a series of 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 Permit Holders or other BCP partners. Some of the subjects that these researchers covered in their studies include water quality monitoring, tree inventory and analysis, and Jollyville Plateau salamander, golden-cheeked warbler, and invertebrate surveys.