



**Gaines Greenbelt  
2015 Annual Report**

**Submitted by the City of Sunset Valley**

## **Introduction**

The Gaines Greenbelt is owned and managed by the City of Sunset Valley as part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP). The Gaines Greenbelt provides habitat for the federally endangered Golden-Cheeked Warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*, GCWA) and a portion contains a public use hike and bike trail. Sunset Valley has signed a Managing Partner Agreement with the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP), The Sunset Valley – BCCP Managing Partner Agreement adds the Sunset Valley Gaines Greenbelt to the BCP Barton Creek Macrosite. The Managing Partner Agreement was officially filed in March, 2014.

The Gaines Greenbelt parcel is approximately 21.9 acres located in Travis County, Texas, at the northern edge of the City of Sunset Valley. The parcel's south side borders the back lot lines of residential sites, a hotel, and a Texas Department of Transportation stormwater pollution prevention facility located along US Highway 71/State Highway 290 West; east of the tract lies a larger-lot residential area; and, the remaining parcel borders the City of Austin's Barton Creek Greenbelt trail system (Appendix A).

## **Golden-cheeked Warbler Surveys**

The City conducts surveys every two years. The next survey will be completed in 2016.

## **Trail Management Activities**

In cooperation with the Hill Country Conservancy and Texas Conservation Corp several sections of trail were rehabilitated or developed to facilitate the Violet Crown Trail. This work was approved as part of the Violet Crown Trail Master Plan by the BCP Coordination Committee. According to the BCP Master Plan Agreement, new or rerouted trails have been completed (Appendix B). For any trail work conducted between March and September, Hill Country Conservancy had biologist on-site to avoid potential habitat conflicts. The new trail was built according to the standards of the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA). Creek crossings and side drainages were armored with native stone to prevent soil disturbance in wet conditions. The armored creek crossings were impacted during intense flood events but received only moderate disturbance. These crossing have been repaired and improved. The new trail was designed to influence use behavior and to avoid user conflicts. Turns, intersections, "choke points" and controlled trail width were utilized to slow trail riders and give clear visual paths to avoid conflicts.

Re-routed, unsustainable trails have been reclaimed as required. These trails were in place for ten years or more and have continued to cause erosion. IMBA standards for reclamation were followed including: breaking up the old trail tread and scarifying the soil, seeding the disturbed area with adapted native grasses and wildflowers, covering the seeded area with duff, bringing in downed limbs to obscure the trail, and “vertical mulching” by “planting” small dead trees to further disguise the old trail. These reclaimed areas have remained intact and have not been disturbed by trail users. Redirected new trail routes have been well accepted by trail users. At this time, there has been no attempt to reopen the old trail segments.

The Hill Country Conservancy has secured the Austin Ridge Riders organization as trail stewards for the Violet Crown Trail, Phase I. The group will help keep the trail in good condition and will offer peer to peer outreach to other trail users in support of the trail system. This relationship will help encourage stewardship among the mountain biking community. Hill Country Conservancy has also selected Olivia Grace Hayden of the Save Barton Creek Association as the trail docent for this phase of the Violet Crown Trail. She will conduct periodic educational tours of the Barton Creek and Violet Crown trails. Although the Violet Crown Trail goes outside of the City of Sunset Valley’s jurisdiction, having these organizations and individuals on-site, on a regular basis will provide an invaluable resource to the City.

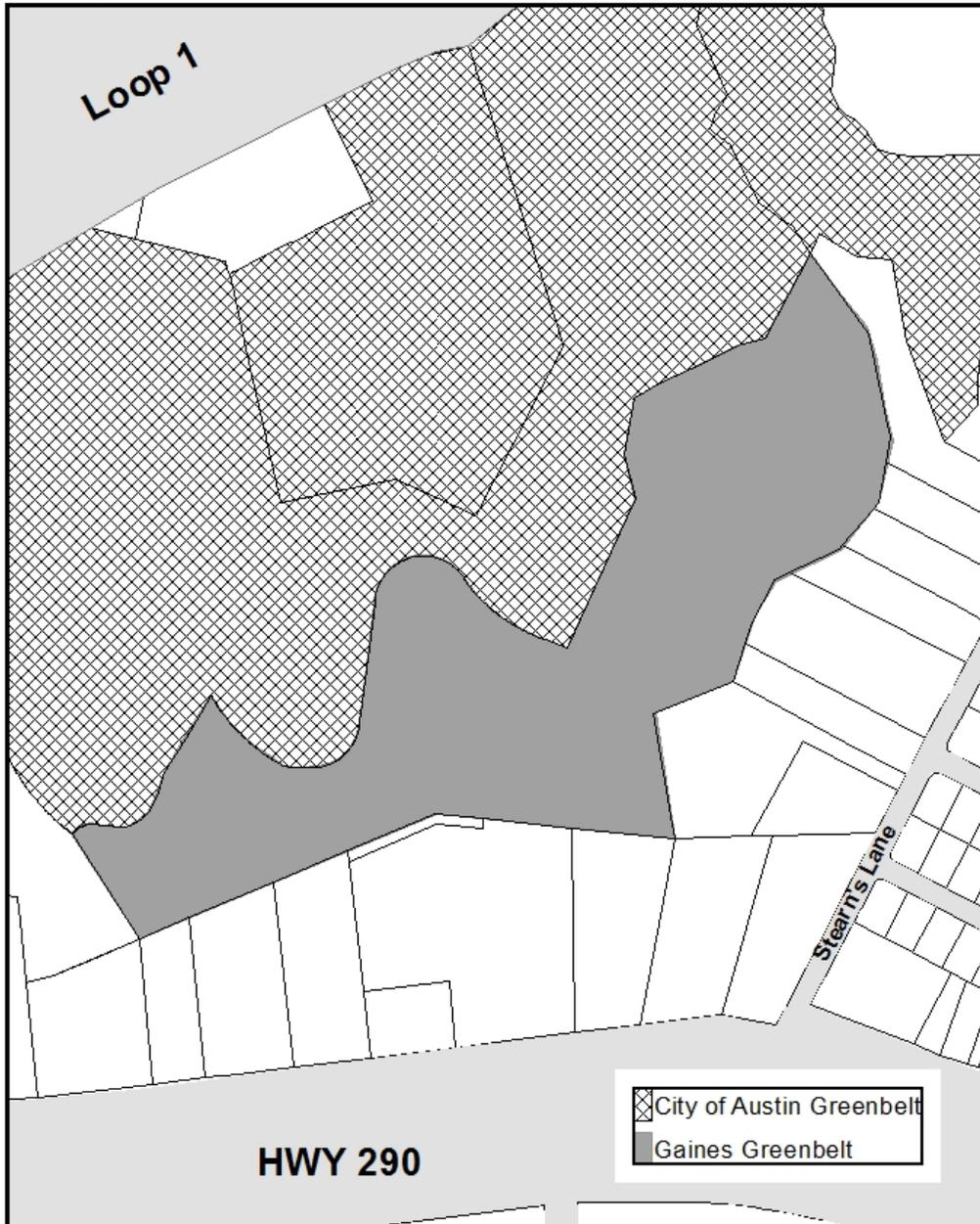
The Violet Crown Trail officially opened on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The City of Sunset Valley has routinely monitored the trail and removed any hazards present. A new trail head has been constructed adjacent to the Highway 290 service road within the City of Sunset Valley. Temporary informational signs have been placed at this trail head to explain trail rules and regulations and to provide a map of the trail system. Mile markers have also been placed along the trail route. These markers will provide photo point locations to monitor changes in the area over time. This can also help determine if there have been any signs of habitat degradation.

## **Appendix A**

# Map of Gaines Greenbelt



1 inch = 0.06 miles



# Trail Reclamation Map for Gaines Creek Area

