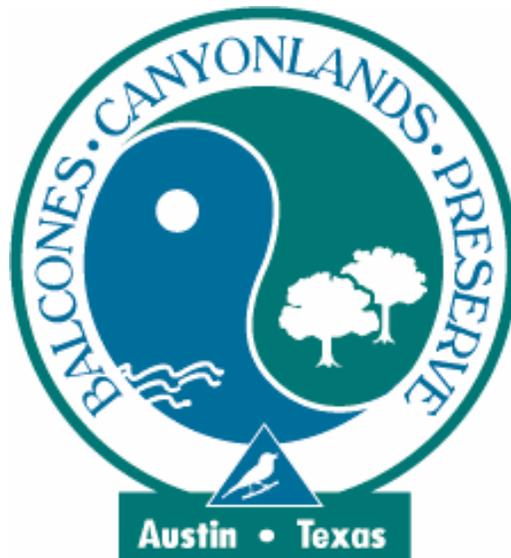


**BALCONES CANYONLANDS PRESERVE  
LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**TIER II A**

**CHAPTER XIII  
PUBLIC EDUCATION**



**August 2007**

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## **1.0 OVERVIEW**

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) system represents a tremendous opportunity for environmental education for area residents—both on the properties in the form of on-site opportunities and through educational programs. This section suggests public information and outreach programs that may be used to educate the general public on the BCP.

The public information and education plan recognizes that all partners in the preserve system have existing environmental education programs. Major partners such as the City of Austin Water Utility – Wildland Conservation Division, Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources, and the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) have assumed leadership roles in environmental education for a number of years through their extensive environmental education programs. This plan is intended to supplement existing programs, and where appropriate, establish new programs specifically addressing preserve issues.

## **2.0 GOAL**

The goal of any BCP education program is to promote and educate the public about the natural resources and conservation mission of the preserve.

## **3.0 RECOMMENDED TOPICS**

As funding permits, it is recommended that partners in the BCP system modify existing programs or develop new programs that cover the following topics:

- Public education about endangered species and the purpose of wildlife preserves;
- Volunteer opportunities to assist with management and education;
- Media and marketing avenues to highlight the unique characteristics of the BCP; and
- Authorized public access to the BCP.

## **4.0 PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

It is recommended that public education programs regarding the BCP address issues including but not limited to feral and domestic cats, use of appropriate seed feeders, fire safety, karst feature protection, and landscape plant selection. Further, these programs should include the following components:

#### **4.1 Site Information.**

Maps should be developed for sites as appropriate that identify the location of the preserves in a standardized format. Utilization of the BCP logo on literature, signage, etc., is recommended.

Brochures and maps of the preserve should include the following where appropriate:

- Seasons or other periods of time when specific sites are available or when site availability changes;
- Special use or restricted access areas within each site; and
- Grandfathered or other approved activities unique to each site.

#### **4.2 Target Audience**

There are a number of different audiences that may be targeted for educational programs, depending on the information to be conveyed and purpose or goal of the program. Possible audiences represent opportunities to actively or passively teach about the BCP, to create a network that supports the BCP within the community, and to reach populations linked to management issues within the BCP. Audiences can be comprised of adults and children, those that legally or illegally access the BCP sites, live near BCP properties, and/or volunteer on sites to assist with management and educational activities.

Local environmental organizations, clubs, ecotourism enterprises, or facilities represent audiences that may easily understand the purpose of the preserve, be willing to share information with members or clients, and publish information and links on their websites. Sites that routinely accommodate the public such as nature centers, park headquarters, museums, recreation centers, senior activity centers, and neighborhood community centers, could provide opportunities for education in the form of posters, kiosks, and photographic displays.

It is recommended that BCP partners also identify audiences within their own agencies, organizations, and/or professional associations. In situations where the public inquires about the BCP by contacting other departments or divisions, individuals not directly associated with the BCP may still be able to provide basic answers and direct them to a source for more detailed information.

Educational institutions also represent target audiences for information about the BCP. Teachers at public and private elementary, middle, and high schools in the Travis County area could integrate information into their science curriculum and/or arrange guided tours

for small groups of students. Adult education outlets such as community colleges, colleges and universities and the informal education classes provide are also audiences to consider.

### **4.3 Train the Trainer Programs**

It is suggested that all partners contribute to the development of “train the trainer” educational programs for volunteer docents/land stewards, either together or for their own educational programs. These programs would develop a cadre of volunteer educators to inform the general public about the BCP.

These trained volunteers could also serve as team leaders of up to 10 untrained volunteers for special workdays. Volunteer activities for groups include gathering and setting out acorns, planting native species, removing exotic plants, cutting selected plants as needed in restoration projects, fencing seedlings for protection, litter removal, and trail maintenance. Volunteers are also needed for non-endangered bird surveys and plant monitoring. Other activities include booth sitting and making presentation to groups and classes.

### **4.4 Grants**

It is suggested that BCP partners investigate and apply for available environmental education grants from governmental agencies, private foundations and similar organizations. Grants should be pursued for both staffing and environmental education program needs. Efforts should be made through agency budgetary processes to expand staffing to include specialist staff for environmental education programs and coordination of community outreach. Partnering with non-profit groups may increase the number of available funding sources and create a source for volunteer assistance with grant writing, administering, and project implementation. BCP partners are encouraged to cooperate to jointly apply for funding of educational programs.

### **4.5 Recommended Site Identifiers**

It is recommended that all sites that are part of the BCP system be identified as belonging to the preserve system. This could be accomplished through the use of the BCP logo or through appropriate wording on signs. If the BCP logo is used, this would further establish a consistent and recognizable symbol unifying distant properties into one preserve system. Signs should specify the access status of the site.

On sites open to the public, information should be provided through interpretive kiosks, brochures, and other methods. Topics should include information on the overall site ecosystem, type of endangered species habitat, known wildlife, etc. Access information provided should include locations or facilities that can be reserved, if any, special site features, trails and trail markings, site restrictions, rules and regulations, and who to contact for more information or in the event of an emergency.

## **5.0 MEDIA AND MARKETING**

Use of media and marketing efforts through existing or new programs within each partner's agency or organization would efficiently disseminate information regarding the BCP. The conservation mission of the preserve, site access requirements, and specific programs or activities could be detailed and highlighted to both the general public and target audiences.

It is suggested that each partner's education, outreach, or media specialists consider development of news releases for public service announcements, feature articles for print and web media, and paid advertisements as components of a media campaign. While news releases are typically concise and often specific to an event, feature articles are opportunities to showcase the BCP in more detail with photographs and maps. Those published on websites could include links to BCP partner websites. Paid advertisements are useful in ensuring complete and accurate information about the BCP is presented to the public outside of a reporter's interpretation, the possibility of omitted facts, and outside of any political viewpoint.

### **5.1 Informational Brochures / Printed Materials**

It is recommended that each partner develop printed materials covering the following topics:

- Information on endangered species, specifically the golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, endangered or threatened plants, and cave invertebrates;
- Information on native flora and fauna also conserved by the BCP;
- Rules and regulations for the preserves;
- Maps as appropriate;
- Information on participation certificates, the development process, and the Preserves role in the development process;
- General ecosystem information on the preserve habitats;
- Information on public involvement programs, i.e., "How you can help your local endangered species?";

- Neighborhood information sheets for neighborhoods adjacent to preserve units; and
- Use of the standardized preserve logo on all publications regarding the preserves.

## **5.2 Physical Facilities at Preserve Sites**

It is recommended that vandal-resistant interpretive kiosks of durable construction be installed at all locations regularly open to the public. On areas of dedicated parkland, self-guided interpretive trails should be developed to provide a self paced educational opportunity. As previously mentioned in section 2.5 in this chapter, standardization of signs, both in wording and appearance, should be a goal of all BCP partners.

## **5.3 Access by Permit**

Many preserve units are available for approved educational service programs. Access permits are utilized by some, but not all, of the BCP partners. For specific information about access on a site, please refer to the Tier III Land Management Plan for each tract or contact the managing agency for information.

## **5.4 Access Information through Internet Website**

Information on the BCP and access points is available on the following partner websites:

City of Austin - <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/preserves/bcp.htm>

Travis County- [http://www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/bccp/bc\\_preserve.asp](http://www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/bccp/bc_preserve.asp)

Lower Colorado River Authority – <http://www.lcra.org/community/balcones.htm>

Travis Audubon Society – <http://www.travisaudubon.org>

The Nature Conservancy – <http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/texas/>