CITY OF AUSTIN PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS

BALCONES CANYONLANDS ANNUAL REPORT
Fiscal Year 2000-01

The City of Austin
Parks & Recreation Department
Natural Resources Division

Prepared by Melody Lytle
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OUTREACH TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

1. Volunteer revegetation efforts

The following two projects were funded by two grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners for Wildlife, with matching funding from volunteer hours:

Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) staff directed 19 volunteer workdays on four riparian tracts within the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP). During this fiscal year, more than 189 volunteers donated more than 766 hours repotting native species seedlings, transplanting hardwood saplings, enclosing them in protective wire cages and watering them. These plants were propagated from seeds gathered on the Preserve. Since its inception in early 2000, this project has placed approximately 650 hardwood saplings on the Preserve. The participants included volunteers from Boy Scout troops, Capital Area Master Naturalist Program, Native Plant Society of Texas, E-CORPS, COA/BCP permit class, and citizens interested in helping with BCP projects.

BCP staff directed seven volunteer workdays on a hardwood protection project that began in 2000. The project involved placing individual wire enclosures around existing hardwood seedlings to protect them from deer browse. Tree species protected included Texas oak, live oak, Texas mulberry, shin oak and escarpment black cherry. Approximately three hundred hardwood saplings were protected.

2. Public symposium on white-tailed deer, February 17, 2001

On February 17, 2001, BCP staff presented a public symposium on white-tailed deer at Travis County's Satellite Two building. Experts from Texas Parks & Wildlife, the LCRA and Southwest Texas State University discussed deer biology and population dynamics. The Proceedings from this event are still available.

3. Public hikes through the Preserve

- February 24, 2001 – Wild Basin walk, directed at the general public and at Wild Basin docents. Approximately 15 people attended.
- May 19/20, 2001 – The public was invited to see golden-cheeked warblers on the Bull Creek Preserve. Approximately 18 people attended this tour.
- October 14, 2000 – Public tour of Forest Ridge. Approximately 15 people attended.

These events and others were publicized on our Announcements web page and in several community calendars and newsletters.

4. Direct communication with the public

- All BCP staff members answer questions from the general public by telephone and email on a daily basis.

- February 6, 2001 – Wild Basin Volunteer Training to give instructional training to Wild Basin Volunteers

- Cub Scout efforts - BCP staff spoke to two cub scout groups in Jester Estates on February 10 and May 6, 2001. These third and fourth graders saw slides of the plants and animals of the Bull Creek Preserve, learned the difference between a park and preserve and discussed the endangered species found near their homes. They were issued Bull Creek Entry permits specifying that they be accompanied by an adult.

5. Austin American Statesman articles and letters to the editor

BCP staff took an Austin Statesman reporter and photographer to the west portion of Forest Ridge on Nov 16, 2000. Andy Alford's extensive article on the BCP appeared on November 18, 2000. This article "Preserve welcoming careful visitors" brought the Preserve and the Bull Creek entry permit class to the attention of many residents.

Other AAS articles and letters to the editor included:

- January 11, 2001 – Jackie Davis' letter to the editor rebutting an earlier letter concerning Preserve closure
- February 6, 2001 – Article entitled: Balcones preserve to expand with grant
- February 8, 2001 – Article entitled: Forest-munching deer put survival of preserve at risk
- February, 2000 – Letter to the editor from Carlo Abbruzzese concerning white-tailed deer overpopulation
- December 7, 2001 – Article entitled: City, county have row over road

6. Television interviews include

- February 8, 2001 - KEYE interview concerning white-tailed deer problems
- February 9, 2001 - KVUE interview concerning feral hog problems.
- February 26, 2001 - Olga Compos interviewed BCP staff about general BCP topics
- February 28, 2001 - Interview by KEYE concerning feral hog problems and grackle populations.
- August 31, 2001 – interview on Channel Seven concerning the Bat Conservation grant for a bat-friendly gate at Goat Cave Karst Preserve.

7. Print materials include:

- Our general information brochure gives an overview of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, its administration and it purpose.
- Our Access brochures details which activities are allowed within each individual City of Austin BCP tract. Both brochures are available by mail and in the Parks and Recreation Department main office.
- We send factsheets with information about the Bull Creek Preserve and maps to those who request them.
- We create single, one-off graphics to be placed in kiosks and to be distributed by our partners. We supplied Travis County BCP staff with several items to be distributed at Texas Parks and Wildlife's Expo.

8. Bull Creek Entry Permit classes

BCP seeks to create an informed user group on the Bull Creek Preserve during golden-cheeked warbler breeding season by issuing entry permits to those who enroll in our free lecture, slide show and field trip. We discuss our program, its necessity and the natural history of our area.

In 2001 we conducted ten classes and 249 students completed requirements for entry permits.

This second year of the permit class effort was far more successful than the first. A November article in the Austin American Statesman and signs at the entry points generated hundreds of permit class inquiries by phone and email. Information was posted to our web site and our email auto-signature referred correspondents to the page. Teaching and field trip duties were conducted by BCP staff. The volunteer sign up sheet provided volunteers for revegetation projects.

This class afforded an opportunity to explain our program to the community. A large number of students were neighbors of the Preserve and Austin new-comers. We gained a great deal of sympathy and support for our program and conservation in general.

The classes were publicized on the BCP web pages, the City of Austin's general calendar web page, channel six, and other community calendars.

9. The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve web pages

BCP web pages continually are updated routinely. These pages have proved to be a cost effective means of reaching the public. See

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/preserves/bcp.htm

OUTREACH TO THE RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY

1. The mountain biking community

In response to requests for access to the Bull Creek Preserve, the BCP Program negotiated with representatives of the mountain biking community. This discussion is still underway.

2. Individual calls and emails concerning general recreation

Many of the phone calls and emails received by staff concern recreation on the Preserve. These questions are answered individually by staff.

OUTREACH TO THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

1. Southwest Texas State University

April 25, 2001 – BCP staff conducted plant rescue efforts on the Bohl's Preserve with the help of student volunteers from Southwest Texas State University.

April 29, 2001 – BCP staff led a Southwest Texas State University geography class field trip to Forest Ridge for approximately two hours. Biodiversity and the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Program's effort to conserve biodiversity were discussed.

April, 2000 – Carlo Abbruzzese spoke to Southwest Texas State University's Conservation Biology class on long-term monitoring of two endangered songbirds on the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.

2. Southwest Texas State University internship program and graduate students

a. The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve staff cooperates with interns from the geography and biology departments. Southwest Texas State interns have
   - Mapped trails
   - Collected vegetation data
   - Created a multi-species database

b. Sue Morris, a Master's candidate at Southwest Texas State, is beginning a study of edge effects in the Bull Creek Preserve.

3. Other academic efforts

- Alan Graber, a graduate student from Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, is beginning a behavioral study of the golden-cheeked warbler on Fort Hood and the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.
- During the 2001 spring semester, BCP staff worked with Dr. Lester Faigley's technological literacy class at the University of Texas to create a multi-page website on the BCP, it goals and controversies.

4. Canyon Creek Elementary School

On April 3, 2001, BCP staff spoke to students at Canyon Creek elementary School.

5. The Master Naturalist Program

On November 3, 2001, BCP staff gave a talk to the Master Naturalists entitled: "Balcones Canyonlands Preserve – Conservation Biology in Suburbia."

OUTREACH TO PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

1. Society for Ecological Restoration

- On August 18, 2001, Carlo Abbruzzese spoke to the Society for Ecological Restoration entitled "Control of Woody Exotic Plants in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve."
- On the same date, Mark Sanders spoke to this group on "How to Control Red Imported Fire Ants with Boiling Water and Quantitatively Measure Its Effectiveness."

2. Texas Academy of Science

- March 2, 2001 – At the annual meeting of the Texas Academy of Science, Carlo Abbruzzese presented a paper entitled "Long-term Monitoring of Two Endangered Songbirds on the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve."
- March 3, 2001 – Also at the annual meeting of the Texas Academy of Science, Dr. Don Koehler's presentation to this group was entitled "BCP, past present and future"