BALCONES CANYONLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN

Annual Report

FY 2010

(October 1, 2009 – Sept. 30, 2010)

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 14 years since the permit's inception, 28,996 acres of habitat have been protected. Populations of covered plant species are being managed to the terms of the permit, and 45 of 62 karst features have received some level of protection.

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 FY 2010, generating $77,525.00 utilized in BCP land acquisition and preserve management and operation efforts.

Preserve Acquisition and Management Expenditures

Travis County acquired or negotiated management agreements to protect 1,304.15 acres contained within nine parcels in FY10, and continued negotiations to acquire remaining key tracts within the Preserve system. The City of Austin acquired one 13.62 acre tract in FY10 and transferred 238.00 acres to the BCP. The Permit Holders expended $15,897,444 on land acquisition activities in FY10. The Permit Holders and cooperating entities expended a combined total of $2,366,737 for operations and maintenance of Preserve lands in FY10.

Public Use and Habitat Management

Public uses permitted on selected tracts prior to the establishment of the BCP continued through FY10. 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 FY10. 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; Jollyville plateau salamander population monitoring, research into the habitat effects and management of native and non-native wildlife populations; impacts of exotic and invasive plants and their control; and ecosystem monitoring to ensure appropriate management for all of the region's unique native wildlife. Some of the additional research completed or underway on the BCP in FY10 included storm water monitoring, freshwater mussel surveys, effects of deer overabundance on avian species, arthropod surveys, and golden-cheeked warbler detectability studies.