BALCONES CANYONLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN

Annual Report
FY 2001

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. The thirty-year permit covers a majority of western Travis County for incidental take of eight endangered species and 27 species of concern. The plan also mitigates the Co-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 City of Austin and Travis County established the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) to set aside and manage 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 unique invertebrates. In the five years since the permit's inception, 25,569 of the required 30,428 acres of habitat have been protected. Populations of covered plant species are being managed, and 42 of the 62 karst features listed in the permit 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. Twenty-four Participation Certificates were issued in FY2001, generating over $2,250,000 in Preserve land acquisition funds. USFWS directed mitigation payments provided an additional $105,000 for land acquisition.

Federal HCP Grants

Since the inception of the BCCP, the City of Austin and Travis County have successfully competed for USFWS Habitat Conservation Plan (Section 6) Grants each year. The HCP grant jointly awarded to the Permit Holders in FY2001 was the largest ever awarded under this program, a total of $14,362,500 in federal funds. These grant funds support land acquisition within the Preserve.

Preserve Acquisition and Management Expenditures

The City of Austin and Travis County acquired over 400 acres of habitat in FY2001, and continued negotiations to purchase remaining key tracts within the Preserve system. Expenditures related to Preserve land acquisition totaled over $4,200,000 in FY2001. In addition, over 800 acres of habitat was transferred to Travis County through Conservation Easements. The Permit Holders and cooperating entities expended a combined total of greater than $1,640,000 for operations and maintenance of Preserve lands in FY2001.

Public Use and Habitat Management

Public uses permitted on selected tracts prior to the establishment of the BCP continued through FY2001. Other Preserve 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

As a component of sound management, research concerning species covered by the BCCP as well as threat assessments to guide management practices continue. Ongoing studies on the Preserve include: monitoring of golden-cheeked warblers on a series of 100-acre study plots throughout the Preserve to determine population trends; black-capped vireo distribution and abundance monitoring; faunal surveys of protected karst features; 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.

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D: Balcones Canyonlands Preserves by Managing Entity
E: Abbruzzese, Carlo. 2001 Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo Monitoring Program.
F: Blanton and Associates, Inc. and Turner Collie and Braden, Inc. Rare Bird Surveys at McGregor Preserve.
G: Blanton and Associates, Inc. and Turner Collie and Braden, Inc. Rare Bird Surveys at Westcave Preserve.
H: Blanton and Associates, Inc. and Turner Collie and Braden, Inc. Rare Bird Surveys at Wheless Preserve.
I: The Committee for Wild Basin Wilderness, Inc. Annual Report for the period Jan.1 2001 – Dec. 31, 2001.

J: Davis, Jackie. City of Austin Brown-headed Cowbird Control Program.

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