

LOWER COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY

Annual Status Report for the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan
October 1st, 2021 - September 30th, 2022.

Mitigation Credits Used

The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), on behalf of LCRA Transmission Services Corporation (LCRA TSC), debited 36.4 acres from its mitigation bank balance between October 2021 and September 2022 for clearing on the Fairland to Lago Vista (T414) Transmission Line Storm Hardening Project, and drilling and clearing for pilot hole investigations for the LCRA Marshall Ford to McNeil (T197) Storm Hardening Project. A section of the T414 transmission line is in Burnet County. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved LCRA to use Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) credits for clearing in Burnet County. LCRA has 223.33 mitigation credits remaining.

Management Highlights

LCRA managed approximately 400 acres as a portion of the preserve system on the McGregor tract and Westcave Preserve. Management activities for these LCRA preserves continued to focus on natural resource research and management, access management, and stewardship promotion.

McGregor

- Deer harvesting was attempted on February 23 and 24, 2022, with no success. Plateau Land and Wildlife Management conducted a white-tailed deer survey at McGregor Preserve in September 2022. The results indicate an estimated white-tailed deer density on the 358-acre McGregor Preserve to be 13.25 acres per deer, for a total of 27 deer. The average density over the last five years of data analysis is approximately 11 acres per deer. The recommended maintenance harvest, based on the latest survey, is two to three deer, not necessarily with an emphasis on doe.
- LCRA provided training to the Comanche Trail Community Association (CTCA) for the McGregor Good Neighbor Program. Training occurred at the CTCA Annual Meeting on April 12, 2022. LCRA issued/renewed twenty-seven (27) permits for those residents that attended the training and signed the “McGregor Good Neighbor Program Permit.” The permit allows residents to hike on the designated trails within the preserve following the permit conditions

Westcave

- Westcave held Heinz Branch Watershed Happy Hour for landowners within the shared watershed. Representatives from the Hays-Trinity Aquifer Groundwater Conservation District and the Travis County Groundwater Conservation District spoke at this event.
- Preserve maintenance was on-going and included trail inspections, trail work, view shed clearing, invasive plant removal, nest box maintenance, tree trimming, bird blind maintenance.
- Programming included bird, night, wellness, and sketching hikes.
- Research programs throughout the year consisted of:
 - Pond Watch (Xerxes Society Citizen Scientist program) surveys were conducted by a core group of volunteers. Surveys consists of bi-weekly dragonfly surveys. Black saddlebags (target migratory species) and common green darner (target migratory species) were the only two species observed out of the five target species.
 - Monthly water quality sampling and testing, conducted at the grotto and at Hammett's crossing. The results were within normal range and submitted to LCRA Colorado River Watch Network (CRWN).
 - Swift Night Out-surveys were conducted in September 2022. There were up to 18 swifts documented at a time.
 - Grotto water flow and Heinz Branch flow monitoring was conducted by staff throughout the fall of 2021 and summer 2022. Measured flows were within normal ranges.
 - Golden-cheeked warbler surveys began in March 2022 and continued until the end of breeding season in early June 2022. Three territories were detected and two of the three were confirmed as successful for breeding and nesting. Pinky, a previously banded male had returned to the same territory for the third year in a row. Two female and one male brown-headed cowbird were dispatched during the season.
 - Nestwatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) began in March 2022. Nesting boxes were monitored and reported for breeding data, predation, and nesting attempts.
 - FrogWatch (Association of Zoo's & Aquarium's: FrogWatch USA) surveys throughout the Grotto began in early March 2022 and ended in early June 2022. These surveys were conducted by one staff member and three volunteers. Common species such as cliff chirping frog, Blanchard cricket frog, and Rio Grande leopard frog were recorded.

- FeederWatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology Citizen Scientist program), which started in November 2021, ended in April 2022. The start of the 2022 season began November 2022. This included weekly monitoring by volunteers and staff of birds at Leif's Bird Blind.
- Biannual cave faunal surveys in Hammett's Cave were conducted in 2022. A total of 25 invertebrate species were identified, which is similar to previous surveys. Surveyors confirmed the presence of an unidentified *Texella* species, initially found inside during a faunal survey conducted in 2019. These two 2022 surveys yielded 15 *Texella* individuals. Westcave is awaiting genetic testing results on this unique species. Additional habitat for karst invertebrates was introduced in two separate areas in the cave to promote diversity and growth.
- Spring researchers from the Texas Water Development Board conducted a spring sampling in late May of 2022 above the Grotto's waterfalls.

Expenditures

LCRA expenditures (10/1/2021 to 9/30/2022): \$4,215.00.00*

*Does not include expenditures by Westcave Preserve Corporation