Wild Basin

WILDERNESS

Annual Report

for the period

Jan. 1, 2001 - Dec. 31, 2001

Presented to

The Travis County Commissioner's Court

January 11, 2002

This annual report on the management and environmental education activities conducted for Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve is submitted in compliance with the contract between The Committe for Wild Basin Wilderness, Inc. and Travis County.

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PRESERVE MANAGEMENT

- The Wild Basin staff implements the policies and priorities set forth by The Committee for Wild Basin Wilderness, Inc. The staff devoted 30 hours weekly to the day-to-day management of the Preserve, including scheduling and supervising all work performed within its boundaries. This included supervision of Wild Basin Rangers, Caretaker, tour leaders, and the coordination of volunteer recruitment and training.

MAINTENANCE AND SANITATION

- More than 2,300 hours of staff time, 4245 hours of community service restitution work time and volunteer time was spent in the management, maintenance, sanitation, repair, revegetation, programs and security of Wild Basin Preserve in 2001.

- Two and one half (2 1/2) miles of trails received routine maintenance. This work included replacing water bars, building steps in steep areas, removing rocks from trails, maintaining trail surfaces, trimming trees and brush from trail surfaces. Trail Hands, the volunteer trail workers and members of the Central Texas Trail Tamers work every month on the second Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon. Occasional volunteer groups provided full-day work as part of their corporate volunteer services to the community. Eagle Scouts have also contributed time and planning to trail maintenance, revegetation and other improvement projects.

- The Easy Access Trail is a continuing maintenance project to keep the trail accessible for wheel chair and stroller use. This short trail required constant maintenance to the surface adequate fir use by the mobility-impaired. The trail was accessible to wheelchairs the whole year of 2001.

- The steps along Tricknee Trail, Laurel Trail, Possum Trail, and Madrone Trail were rebuilt in areas where the steps had deteriorated. Unauthorized trails along Creek Trail, Easy Access Trail, Laurel Trail, and Possum Trail were covered with brush. The rock on the Creek Trail was stabilized and rocks lining all of the trails were continually replaced. This is an ongoing effort.

- As in previous years, fire ants were not found this past year and no controls were performed.

- We have been far more aggressive than in the recent past on removal of invasive, non-native plants such as honeysuckle, ligustrum and nandina. We have added Vitex to the list of undesirables. We documented a large patch of Vitex growing near the entrance and, after observing it's invasive nature on our slopes, we began removing it by hand cutting. We continue a program of revisiting the plants that were removed and cutting their sprouts. When the plants are on a boundary line between the Basin and City of Austin's Black-capped Vireo preserve, we have sought support for treating sprouts. At the present time, nobody on the staff at Wild Basin is licensed for this procedure.

VISITATION

- More than one thousand six hundred (1,600) visitors signed in the Wild Basin's visitation register. Visitors came from several cities in Texas. They came from 45 states in the United States. Visitors from around the world included guests from West Indies, Germany, Austria, England, Singapore, Australia, Canada, Scotland, Finland, Japan, Spain, Korea, Colombia, Denmark, Wales, Brazil, Belgium, Sweden, Indonesia, South Africa, Switzerland, Venezuela and Argentina. Because so few visitors actually sign in at the guest register, the actual number of visitors is not known.

REPAIRS AND REVEGETATION

- Controlling erosion damage on the entry road is a continuing maintenance project. The road slopes downward toward the north so the rock continues to move in that direction. Volunteers moved the gravel by hand to the uphill side of the road. Preliminary discussions have been held with county staff and engineers to determine solutions for a more permanent road surface.

- Revegetation was pushed in 2001 thanks to improved rainfalls

- Volunteers and community service restitution workers removed trash from both entrances of Bee Creek trails and along the roadside to the north up to the City's Vireo Preserve and to the south up to the road cut at Bee Cave Road and Capital of Texas Highway, as well as throughout the Basin.

- New signs have been placed at the closed back entrance on Wild Basin Road and at the Loop 360 entrance. These were provided by Travis County. Additionally, new trailhead signs were provided to better inform visitors about rules of the trail.

- Unauthorized entry and off-trail activity continues to be one of the major problems especially at the waterfall, the rear entrance (Wild Basin Ledge area) of the Preserve, and near the Overlook. Other trails are appearing near the entrance and on the area opposite the Overlook. In 2001 unauthorized trails and entry areas were watched. Efforts have been made to block the trails with vegetation and plantings. Signs have been placed at the entrances to some of these trails advising people that the area is closed to access.

SURVEYS

- Paul Turner of Druid Environmental oversaw an endangered species study of the Golden-Cheeked Warbler. He determined that male gews were consistently located at two disjunct locations at Wild Basin during the 2001 nesting season. These locations were northwest of the pond along North Creek, and between Brown's Hollow and the Woodland Trail along Bee Creek. Female gews were noted on April 1 for both of these locations and again on May 7 for the North Creek location.

  A simultaneous identification of two male gews occurred only once during the survey period. On April 1, two males were heard along North Creek. On March 25, a non-recurrent sighting of a gew male occurred southeast of the Elm Grove on slopes above Bee Creek, and partially off the Wild Basin property.

  Field observations for 2001 at Wild Basin presume the presence of two mated pairs of gews, and perhaps one or two additional males frequenting the site during parts of the nesting season.

- Volunteers, in conjunction with Mike Powers, continued a boundary survey of the perimeter for the purpose of determining the degree of trespass and to identify the boundary. The director, along with other volunteers, continued working on the survey with the benefit of a hand-held gps. This process will continue with the goal of opening up a perimeter boundary that can be walked periodically and monitored.

SECURITY

- More than one thousand (1,000) hours were spent by the caretaker who patrolled at night, on holidays, and weekends. He opens the gates to the preserve at dawn and locks the gates at dusk (or as quickly as visitors can be encouraged to leave). He does spot checks in the evening to discourage nighttime illegal entry to the preserve.

- A few random vehicle break-ins have occurred in our parking lot throughout 2001, but nothing with any regularity that established a

pattern. There was some frequency during the summer but after we began a regular observation, the activities discontinued. Staff and volunteers have continued surveillance of the parking area and to alert visitors to the possibility of vehicles being entered or vandalized. Particular attention has been given to notification of large groups meeting at the Basin. Some assistance on monitoring for possible problems was provided by Travis County officials.

- Visitors were notified about fire dangers when this was a risk during 2001. Signs in the parking area and along the trail entrance advised visitors of the risk and an interpretive display on the porch strengthened this warning. Additionally visitors have been advised about their personal safety while hiking in extreme heat and suggestions have been provided to encourage their following some basic safety precautions.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Interpretation and Environmental Education

- The education programs offered to schools and to the community are designed to promote awareness of environmental preservation and maintenance, to encourage wise stewardship of the land.

- It is an essential strategy to carry out the preservation of Wild Basin outside its property boundaries. Many pressures on the natural quality of the preserve come from outside the preserve itself: invasive exotic plants and domestic animals, rapidly increasing water pollution in the Bee Creek watershed, air, sound, and light pollution. Programs at Wild Basin this year continue to focus on enhancing awareness of the impacts on Wild communities.

- Through strategies that include "the outdoor experience", exploration, study, interpretation, and experimentation Wild Basin will continue working to inspire an appreciation of nature and to empower each visitor to take responsibility for preserving our natural environment.

- Wild Basin has developed ongoing family education programs to encourage a stronger support base from families in the community. Family Trail Days is a monthly family program that facilitates connecting people who provide environmental-type services with people who could benefit.

Education

- Kiki Corry continues to assist with implementing educational programs. These include scout and after school programs, Family Trail Days, parent/preschool walks and school tours.

- School tours served over 2500 students over a period of twenty (20) weeks. Tour were conducted in the spring and again in the fall. Group size limits have been restricted and held to maximums of 50 per visit. Groups include public and private schools, parochial schools and home-school groups primarily in age groups 1st - 6th grades.

- Esther McCormick, Jewel Pollard and Kiki Corry trained volunteer tour guides for the spring and fall. Both sessions were comprised of seven (7) weeks of training totaling 28 hours. In the January sessions of 2001 we trained 15 rangers from Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Parks and Natural Resources. This was a collaboration in which we trained Travis County staff to conduct Wild Basin style tours.

We routed tour requests to Hamilton Pool and Southeast Metro. Travis County rangers also responded to our needs for tour assistance.

- Mike Powers, under guidance of the Land Management Committee and the Education Committee, helped to begin a process whereby long-term community service volunteers all received an educational orientation to the Basin. The requirement that all land/trail maintenance volunteers participate in an educational guided tour continued with success into 2001.

- Eleven (11) different programs were scheduled through the Lone Star Girl Scout Council's Possibilities program and the Boy Scout Council including Snakes Alive, Birding, Flintknapping and Native Plants. Journaling through the Seasons, NEWS: Finding Your Way, Pack it Right, Geology and Fossils, Indian Lore, and Tree Identification occurred during 2001 and were attended by 600 children and 120 adults. More were scheduled but rainy weather prevented many tours from occurring in 2001.

- Tiny Footprints continued in 2001, offering experiential, small-group, high quality experiences along the trails for 3, 4 and 5 year olds. Over 300 children visited as part of the Tiny Footprints tours.

- Wee Trails is a program similar to Tiny Footprints that goes to the schools to help them discover "habitats" and nature in their backyards. We began this program in 2001 satisfying the curiosity of over 600 children in East Austin.

SUMMER PROGRAM

- Laurie Sharp and Nancy Riley taught the summer program, Hill Country Natural Science School. A total of 96 children attended the four week-long sessions from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Two college interns assisted the camp instructors. A second session was introduced. This was a partnership with Zachary Scott Theater. Two of their instructors joined with one of our instructors to provide "informal science education" for another 96 children. In this program they learned about geology, hydrology and habitats through drama, musicals, and soap operas. Their productions were presented on the last day of the 5-day, 4-hour, program.

- Summer interns joined us during the summer, providing invaluable support. Nathan Drozd joined us from A&M and conducted a herp survey. He worked with us from mid May through mid August and assisted in many ways, beyond the required survey.

UT Informal Science students joined the Hill Country Natural Science School teachers to learn more about teaching in summer camps. We had 5 students in the June sessions and 4 in the July sessions.

TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Thirty-six (36) docent guides were trained for weekday, preschool and weekend programs at Wild Basin. Two home-school students joined the training for Tiny Footprints.

- Weekend tour guides were trained during two training sessions in 2001. Each training session was comprised of three weeks of training for four hours each week.

- Trail maintenance/Community Service Restitution volunteers continued to receive educational training before proceeding with trail work in 2001.

- Board members and regular trail maintenance volunteers participated in a trail building and maintenance workshop at Wild Basin. This was conducted by members of the group, Central Texas Trail Tamers.

AFFILIATIONS WITH OTHER GROUPS

- Wild Basin has endeavored to develop strong relationships with like-minded groups in the community. Rather than reinventing new programs connections between us and other organizations has been actively pursued. In 2002 the following groups have held regular meetings at the Basin:

Austin Paddling Club
Central Texas Trail Tamers
Native Plant Society of Texas
Sierra Club
Texas Earth Science Week Coalition
Texas Environmental Awareness Network

Other groups have used Wild Basin as a site for periodic meetings:

Austin Astronomical Society
City of Austin Watershed Protection Department
Horned Lizard Conservation Society
Master Naturalists
Texas Parks and Wildlife
TNRCC
Travis Audubon Society
TreeFolks
Westlake Chamber of Commerce

Partnerships are pursued to strengthen relationships and to improve the educational content. In 2001 we enriched partnerships with:

ACCESS
Austin Astronomical Society
Austin Energy
Austin Gem and Mineral Society
Austin Museum Partnership
Bamberger Ranch/Selah, Johnson City
Barnes and Noble Bookstores
Bureau of Economic Geology
Dell Computer
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
Lower Colorado River Authority
Maplewood Elementary (AISD)
Motorolla
Texas Audubon Society
Texas Forest Service
Texas Solar Energy Society
Texas Woodcarvers Society
Travis Audubon Society
Travis County
Westlake Picayune Newspaper

We are of the belief that Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve can work with all of the similar organizations in the community to pursue obtaining the highest quality of life for all of the residents.

PUBLICATIONS

- Four (4) issues of theWild Basin Newsletter were produced and distributed.
- Four (4) issues of the Volunteer Newsletter were produced and distributed.
- A Volunteer Training Manual was reprinted, complete with TAAS and TEKS information for school groups.
- A Tiny Footprints Training Manual was expanded to include two new themes: Rocks and Squirrel/Acorns

INTERPRETIVE DISPLAYS

- **"What's Blooming"** informational display was maintained on the porch of the Educational Building throughout the year.
- Volunteers and staff devoted 50 hours per week to continuing the environmental education activities of Wild Basin during weekdays. Kiki Corry (staff) and volunteer Esther McCormick trained tour guides for

the spring and fall school semester. Volunteers led educational tours of the Basin and supervised the training and guide program.

- Volunteers and staff also served as on-site experts on a variety of environmental topics including plants, revegetation, birds, animals, and geology. They were accessible to Preserve visitors and callers answering questions about the Preserve environment.

- A small collection of arrowheads was maintained and displayed in the Great Hall.

- A forest floor display was established, complete with typical decomposing invertebrates. Interpretive material accompanies the exhibit.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TOURS

- Twenty-five hundred (2500) public and private school children representing more than 56 classes experienced educational programs at the Wild Basin during the past year. While most of the students were elementary level, several high school classes participated in Wild Basin programs as well.

- Wild Basin and the Lone Star Girl Scout offered educational programs to scouts from a fourteen-county area. The scouts are awarded Wild Basin badges for these programs. Volunteers and staff conducted these weekday and weekend programs.

GROUP TOURS

- One hundred fifteen (125) groups, including Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Community Groups, church groups, Extend-a-care, Day cares, corporate groups, and retirement groups visited and/or participated in guided or self-guided tours at Wild Basin.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

- Twenty-five (25) hours of speaking engagements about the unique environment of Wild Basin were provided to local civic groups and clubs.

- One hundred(100) hours of volunteer time was spent representing Wild Basin at community events.

- One hundred plus(100+) hours of volunteer time was spent representing Wild Basin at corporate and community health seminars.

- Staff and volunteers served as on-site points of contact regarding questions about plants, animal life, geology and water issues for visitors and callers.

- Board members and volunteers served as Wild Basin liaison and representatives at a variety of community events and meetings.

- Worked with teachers, principal and students at Maplewood Elementary as a partner school providing educational opportunities on Solar Energy and interpretive trail walks.

- Over 600 middle school students benefited from an Earth Science Program, Earth Science Career Day Fair, co coordinated by Carol Knepp and Sigrid Clift (Bureau of Economic Geology). $3,000 was raised by the Earth Science Committee for support of the Austin Public Library's earth science youth collection.

INFORMATION SERVICES

- The Wild Basin office was open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on weekdays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. The office is open for 50 weeks of the year. Office Volunteers devoted more than 2,500 hours during the year to greeting visitors, answering questions about the preserve, giving directions, scheduling tours, and answering the phone. Visitors were able to gain additional access to the Basin on-line at www.wildbasin.org

BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS

- A Bird Survey was conducted this year by Druid Environmental to survey Golden-cheeked Warbler populations in the Basin. Two-nesting pairs of Golden-cheeked Warblers were identified as were two male territories.

LONG-RANGE PLANNING

Preserve: to keep safe from injury, harm or destruction; to protect; to keep alive, intact, free from decay; to reserve for special use. (Webster)

Security and Safety

- Deterring vandalism, and preventing the removal of any natural feature, living or non-living from the preserve are ongoing daily activities in the Preserve.

- Safety is promoted by educating visitors about the environment. A telephone for emergency use is provided inside the Environmental Education Center during actual business hours.

- Signs alerting visitors to avoid smoking and to not leave valuables in vehicles are placed at strategic areas along the road and trails.

- Signs were placed along trails alerting visitors of high fire dangers.

Trail System

- The existing trails (see map) comprise a system of active, rested, and retired (and revegetated) paths used for human circulation within the Preserve.

- Three interpretive signs were placed along the trails providing educational material to educate visitors about the diversity of the surroundings.

- A management system is being implemented to include erosion control at stop #5, a creek access area along the trail system.

Plant and Animal Communities

- Human impact on its natural integrity is minimized by restricting visitor access to trails. Exceptions for special education or scientific purposes, can be made.

- Invasive domestic animals, as well as, exotic plant and animal species are managed to protect native plant and animal populations. Contacts have been made with local exterminators to eliminate the drop-offs of trapped animals from their businesses.

- The manipulation of native plant communities will probably be warranted in the future, but such programs will be implemented only when:

  1) baseline biological data has been collected, (so that changes can be monitored and evaluated), and

  2) a consensus has been reached setting specific management goals and objectives, including integration into the BCP conservation plan, and

  3) a financial plan for long-term management has been implemented.

Improvement on Private Land

- Weeding along the driveway, and removal of invasive plant material has been an ongoing project throughout the year.

- A boundary survey will be completed in 2002 with the intention that it can be used as an educational component of our neighbor awareness program.

- A bus turnaround was built in the driveway at the same time improvements were made to the surface of the driveway. This was provided by donations made possible by one of our Board Members. Delivery ramp and delivery driveway improvements will be implemented in 2002.

- An entrance station is planned to provide additional visitor direction for their Basin experience. This will be placed at the turnaround.

Education

- Training began in 2001 for volunteers and Travis County staff to address varying interpretive needs, ours at Wild Basin and those of Travis County Parks. Fifteen Travis County employees joined our bi-annual guide training program and that we would work with two parks, Hamilton Pool and SouthEast Metro staff, to schedule school tours in 2001. This is part of an ongoing effort to strengthen our mutual programs.

- Wild Basin has been actively forming a strong educational relationship with BCP through an education committee and by participating in Land Manager meetings. We are also working with other BCP partners to extend the reach of our combined community.

THE COMMITTEE FOR WILD BASIN WILDERNESS, INC.

The Committee for Wild Basin Wilderness, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting responsible stewardship through education. The mission of The Committee for Wild Basin Wilderness, Inc. is to preserve and maintain Wild Basin and to educate people about the natural environment.

STRUCTURE

The Board of Directors of Wild Basin Wilderness, Inc. is comprised of sixteen members. Under the direction of Board Members are six standing committees including Development/Membership, Finance/Management, Education, Land Management, Personnel, and Building.

BOARD MEMBERS

- Ray Benson, Development - Ray is the founder and the leader of Asleep at the Wheel, a Texas Swing band. He has produced more than 15 albums and performed in many venues.

- Larry Baldauf, Development, Personnel, Finance - Larry is a program manager in the Systems Development Operations, Quality, and Re-engineering department of IBM. He has a Master of Science degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Texas. He is a member/contributor of the Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund, Save Our Springs Coalition, and Austin Ecology Action.

- Pat Barnes, Finance, Development, Secretary - Pat is a real estate attorney with Barnes and Karish and has served on the advisory committee for many years.

- Carolyn Biegert, Vice President, Personnel, Education - Carolyn is a senior editor at Holt, Rhinehart and Winston. She volunteers in educational programs and helps conduct weekend guide training. She has been a member for five years.

- Blake Buffington, Building, Finance Committees, - Blake is an attorney. He has been on the board for two years.

- Joseph DiQuinzio, Building Committee – Joe joined this year. He is a land developer for JadCo.

- Candis Erskine, Development, - Candis is a community leader and has been active in Texas and the Westlake Community for many years.

- Richard Fadal, Land, Finance – Richard joined this year. He is owner of TexasScapes.

- Harlin Hanson, Education/Land Management Committee.- Harlin is an Operating System Specialist at The University of Texas. He has served as a tour guide and illustrated, The *Trail of Old Time Texas* and *Care for the Rare*. He, with editorial suggestions from committee members, wrote and illustrated Leaflets *Three*, *Noisy Names*, and *Surprises*.

- Fidel Hernandez, Parliamentarian, Finance, Building Committees – Fidel is the President of COM-TEX, a communications equipment and systems dealer. He is an active community leader and he has served on the Board for three years.

- Mack Holloway, Assistant Treasurer, Finance - Mack is a Senior Managing Associate in State and Local Government Consulting with Price Waterhouse Coopers LLP. He has been a member of the board for one year.

- Karen Lynn Huber, Land Management Committee - Karen joined this year. She has worked with The Nature Conservancy and has served on Travis County committees for land issues.

- Sue Littlefield, Development Committee - Sue is a real estate attorney for Armbrust Brown & Davis. She has served on various fund-raising committees with Wild Basin prior to joining the Board.

- Flo Macklin, Personnel Committee – Flo is a Founding Member of Wild Basin. She is volunteers in the office as well as at the Westbank Community Library and Meals on Wheels.

- JoAnn Merica, Legal Counsel – JoAnn has provided this support for several years.

- Elaine Miller, Education Committee – Elaine joined this year. Technology librarian for Westbank Library and neighbor.

- Lin Poor, Land Management Committee – Lin joined this year. He is employed at LCRA as a Senior Land Manager.

- Pam Reed, Development Committee - Pam is an attorney in private practice. She has served on the Travis County Commissioner's Court and has been a Water Commissioner for Texas.

- C. Brooks Schuelke, Board President, Development Committee - Brooks is an attorney with Perlmutter & Reagan, LLP. He has a Bachelors degree in Business Administration from The University of Texas and a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree with honors from The University of Texas School of Law. He is active in the Travis County Bar Association, Austin Young Lawyers Association, and a volunteer with Volunteer Legal Services. He additionally has the distinction of being the only Board member to have gone on an educational tour when he was in elementary school.

- Mary Teague, Development and Personnel Committees, - Mary is a psychiatrist in private practice. Mary has recently joined the board and has been very busy on the development committee.

- Rick Windham, Development, Finance, Treasurer - Rick is an administrator in Women Partners in Health in Austin. He holds a black belt in karate and volunteers for Wildlife Rescue and Capital City Playhouse.

STAFF

Executive Director:

- Carol Knepp has been with Wild Basin since January 1999 and her responsibilities include overseeing the educational program and its development, land management and to oversee the administration of Wild Basin and personnel. Carol also works with BCCP, Travis County, City of Austin, and other agencies, organizations and non-profits to facilitate ongoing relations and partnerships.

Development Director:

- Georganne Foster joined Wild Basin in 1994 as office administrator/facilities manager. In 2000 she became the Development Director. She has coordinated events such as Haunted Trails, Spring Art and Music Festival, and Natural Palette.

Facilities Manager

- Jerome Collins joined Wild Basin in June 2000. Jerome is responsible for volunteer management, financial records, building and office management, publications, and building facility management

Education Assistant:

- Kiki Corry joined Wild Basin on a part-time basis in December 1999, but soon moved into a fulltime position. She has worked closely with guide training and conducting tours with schools, scouts, adults and community service volunteers. Additionally, she coordinates the Family Trail Days monthly events.

Caretaker

- Mike Powers has been the caretaker since January 2000 and has been responsible for training our trail maintenance team. He has worked with us to develop sensitivity and awareness of our various trail maintenance volunteers. We have established a program of conducting tour education for regular trail maintenance volunteers. We provide copies of plant pictures for the species they will be working with. Additionally he has:
    - followed through with a monthly reporting system
    - attends monthly land management meetings
    - repaired and replaced many of the diversion water bars on the trails
    - maintained the trails and repaired erosion damage
    - overseen the ongoing efforts of removing non-native plants

Part-time Rangers

- Kathy Powell has been a weekend ranger since 1997 and has been responsible for working with weekend volunteers and assisting weekend visitors.

- Joe Machuca has been a weekend ranger since 1999 and has been responsible for working with weekend volunteers and assisting weekend visitors as well with Haunted Trails volunteers during the months of September and October.

- Sally Scott has been a weekend ranger since 2001 and has been responsible for working with weekend volunteers, assisting weekend visitors and assisting evening visitors during nighttime programs (Star gazing and moon light walks).