

**Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP)
Updates for McGregor and Westcave Preserves**

**Q1 Report
October – December 2021**

McGregor Preserve

LCRA continues to work with the Comanche Trail Community Association (CTCA) to provide training for the McGregor Good Neighbor Program. The CTCA is in the process of electing a new president, which has delayed training. Once residents interested in hiking the trails are trained, LCRA can issue new and renewed permits.

Westcave Preserve Land Management Activities

A neighbor of the preserve donated several native trees, shrubs and perennials for a new butterfly garden and walkway at the entrance of Leif Bird Blind. Staff cleared and prepared the areas to install the garden. Three volunteer workdays were held to move soil and plant gardens.

Staff met with Travis County Parks and Hill Country Alliance to discuss and start the process of making Westcave a Dark Sky Night Park.

A Summer 2022 burn is in the planning stages with Travis County Parks, who has agreed to lead the burn. Staff is maintaining fire lines and harvesting native grass seeds for dispersal after the burn.

A Texas Barberry vegetation survey was completed. Surveys are meant to monitor the health and growth of this endemic plant and are conducted every four years.

Preserve maintenance is on-going and includes trail inspections, trail work, bird blind maintenance, boundary inspections, boundary maintenance, and butterfly garden upkeep

Programs conducted included a plant walk, six bird hikes, and a full moon hike.

Research consisted of the following:

1. Ongoing, monthly Pond (Dragonfly) Watch (Xerxes Society-Citizen Scientist program) surveys were conducted by a core group of volunteers.
2. Monthly water sampling was conducted to check water quality at the Grotto and at Hammett's Crossing. Results were reported to LCRA.
3. Feeder Watch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology citizen science program) started in November 2021 and consists of a core group of volunteers conducting ongoing, bi-weekly bird surveys.

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**Q2 Report
January - March 2022**

McGregor Preserve

Deer harvesting was attempted on February 23 and 24, 2022 with no success.

LCRA continues to work with the Comanche Trail Community Association (CTCA) to provide training for the McGregor Good Neighbor Program. Training is scheduled to occur at the CTCA Annual Meeting planned for April 12, 2022. Once residents interested in hiking the trails are trained, LCRA can issue new and renewed permits.

Westcave Preserve Land Management Activities

Staff and volunteer efforts at Leif's Bird Blind have allowed previously planted trees, shrubs, annuals, and perennials to survive the winter and fall and begin to bloom in time for spring.

The summer 2022 prescribed burn is still in progress as staff maintains fire lines along the Uplands.

Preserve maintenance is on-going and includes trail inspections, trail maintenance, bird blind maintenance, boundary inspections, boundary maintenance, butterfly garden upkeep, and building maintenance.

Staff is still collecting data for Night Sky Quality readings as part of the application process to become a Dark Sky Park. The application is nearly complete.

Programs conducted at the preserve included two bird hikes, a nature hike, and a night hike.

Research consisted of the following:

1. Internal Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA) surveys involving sighting and resighting started in mid-March 2022. The total number of territories are currently unknown. A GCWA named "Pinky" (banded Red/Silver and Pink/Pink) has officially returned for a third year since banded in 2019.
2. Monthly water sampling was conducted to check water quality at Heinz Branch. Results were reported to LCRA.
3. Feeder Watch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology citizen science program) started in November 2021 and continued into this quarter. A core group of volunteers continues to conduct weekly surveys.
4. Frogwatch (Association of Zoos & Aquariums) started in February 2022. A select few volunteers travel down the grotto canyon to listen and collect data on frog species.
5. Nesting boxes were maintained and installed throughout the property. Weekly to biweekly nest checks were made by staff and interns as part of NestWatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology Citizen Science Program).

LCRA Transmission Services Corporation (LCRA TSC) Activities

LCRA TSC is planning to storm harden the existing (Marshall Ford to Spicewood to McNeil) 138-kV electric transmission lines that runs through several Balcones Canyonlands Preserves. Construction was originally scheduled for the fall of 2022 but was moved out one year to the fall of

2023. Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) delineations were conducted in January and February 2022 by Blanton & Associates, Inc. to assist in required permitting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). LCRA TSC anticipates Section 7 consultation may be triggered for several of the stream crossings that need to be constructed due to their proximity to protected habitat for GCWA and karst invertebrates.

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**Q3 Report
April - June 2022**

McGregor Preserve

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 Preserve Land Management Activities

Staff and volunteer efforts continue to water and fertilize planted trees and gardens throughout the summer.

The summer 2022 prescribed burn was postponed and rescheduled for September. Staff is still maintaining fire lines along the Uplands.

Preserve maintenance is on-going and includes trail inspections, trail maintenance, bird blind maintenance, boundary inspections, boundary maintenance, butterfly garden upkeep, and building maintenance.

Staff is still collecting data for Night Sky Quality readings. The application for Westcave to become a Dark Sky Park is nearly complete with only a few items missing including data.

Non-native plant removal was conducted in the canyon.

Game cameras were installed in the canyon, off trail, to detect the presence/absence of non-native animals. Eight Axis deer were detected.

An aerial feeding station was installed at Murphy’s Bird Blind.

Programs conducted at the preserve included three bird hikes.

Research consisted of the following:

- 1) Internal Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA) surveys involving sighting and resighting started in mid-March 2022. Three territories were identified at the preserve. A GCWA named “Pinky” (banded Red/Silver and Pink/Pink) has officially returned for a third year since banded in 2019. An additional male was banded this season. Three brown-headed cowbirds were dispatched on property.
- 2) Monthly water sampling was conducted to check water quality at Heinz Branch. Results were reported to LCRA.
- 3) Feeder Watch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology citizen science program) started in November 2021 and is ongoing. A core group of volunteers continues to conduct weekly surveys.
- 4) Weekly to biweekly nest checks were made by staff and interns as part of NestWatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology Citizen Science Program).

- 5) Volunteers conducted bi-weekly Dragonfly watch as part of the Migratory Dragonfly Partnership Citizen Science Program.
- 6) Staff collected population data and trends with Harvester Ants on the preserve.

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**Q4 Report
July - September 2022**

McGregor Preserve

Plateau Land and Wildlife Management conducted a deer survey at McGregor Preserve in September 2022. LCRA is waiting for the final report, which will include population in acres/deer, and recommendations on harvest numbers.

Westcave Preserve Land Management Activities

Westcave welcomed Jenny McMillan as the new Executive Director.

Staff and volunteer efforts continue to water and fertilize planted trees and gardens throughout the summer.

Staff prepared for a prescribed burn of the prairie, scheduled for October 2022.

Preserve maintenance is on-going and includes trail inspections, trail maintenance, bird blind maintenance, boundary inspections, boundary maintenance, butterfly garden upkeep, and building maintenance.

Staff is still collecting data for Night Sky Quality readings. The application for Westcave to become a Dark Sky Park is nearly complete, with only a couple of items missing including data.

Game cameras were installed in the canyon, off trail, to detect the presence/absence of non-native animals. Eight individual Axis deer were detected.

A roundtable social was held at Westcave Preserve that included local groundwater conservation districts and the University of Texas School of Economics. Sixty-two people were in attendance to give updates on groundwater conservation.

Staff conducted Firewise preparations around the facility.

Research consisted of the following:

- 1) Monthly water sampling was conducted to check water quality at Heinz Branch. Results were reported to LCRA.
- 2) Volunteers conducted bi-weekly Dragonfly watch as part of the Migratory Dragonfly Partnership Citizen Science Program.
- 3) Staff collected population data and trends with Harvester Ants on the preserve.
- 4) Biannual cave faunal surveys were conducted in collaboration with Travis County Natural Resources Department.