

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK
BALCONES CANYONLANDS PRESERVE



Travis County
Natural Resources and
Environmental Quality
Division

Table of Contents

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.....1

Volunteer Opportunities.....5

Volunteer Status.....5

Nondiscrimination.....5

Confidentiality.....6

Acceptance and Appointment.....7

Guided and Independent Volunteer Projects.....7

Service Agreement.....8

Volunteer Guidance.....8

Youth Volunteer and/or Service Learning…..10

Volunteer Orientation and Project Training...10

Safety and Liability.....11

Dress Code.....12

Preserve Access.....13

Absenteeism.....13

Guidelines for Working on the Preserve.....13

Guidelines for Volunteer Conduct.....14

Volunteer Conflict Resolution.....16

Emergency Closings.....17

Use of Travis County Property.....17

Volunteer Use of Personal Property.....18

Volunteer Records.....18

Feedback.....18

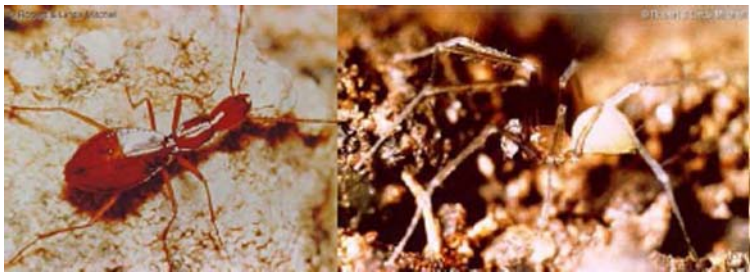
Recognition.....19

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

On May 2, 1996, Travis County and the City of Austin were jointly issued a regional permit by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that allows incidental "take" of eight locally occurring federally listed endangered species under Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act.

"Take" is defined in the Endangered Species Act as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect any threatened or endangered species. Harm may include habitat modification that impacts a listed species through impairment of essential behavior (e.g., nesting or reproduction).





Tooth Cave ground beetle* Tooth Cave spider*

The eight endangered species include the golden- cheeked warbler (Dendroica chrysoparia) and black-capped vireo (Vireo atricapilla) and the following six karst invertebrates:

- Tooth Cave pseudoscorpion (Tartarocreagris texana)
- Tooth Cave spider (Neoleptoneta myopica)
- Tooth Cave ground beetle (Rhadine persephone)
- Kretschmarr Cave mold beetle (Texamaurops reddelli)
- Bone Cave harvestman (Texella reyesi
- Bee Creek Cave harvestman (Texella reddelli)



Bone Cave harvestman* Kretschmarr Cave mold beetle*

* Photo Credit: Greg Lasley

This community-based solution, referred to as the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP), calls for the creation of a preserve system to protect these eight endangered species as well as 27 other species of concern believed to be at risk.

The BCCP is a 30-year regional permit that allows for incidental take outside of proposed preserve lands and provides mitigation for development. Landowners and developers may participate in the BCCP to mitigate for development of endangered species habitat rather than mitigating directly through the US Fish and Wildlife Service (agency responsible for enforcing Endangered Species Act).



To minimize and mitigate the impacts of take, Travis County and the City of Austin agreed to assemble a minimum of 30,428 acres of endangered species habitat and 62 caves in western Travis County by 2016. The preserved habitat, called the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), consists of many tracts of land owned or managed by different various partners. Currently over 29,000 acres of endangered species

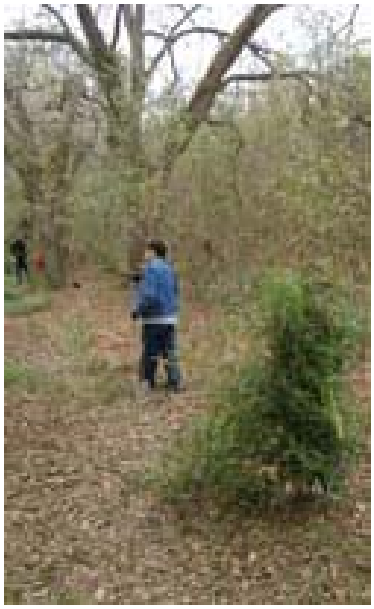
habitat and 45 caves have been protected. Travis County owns more than 6,000 acres and is continuing to acquire land.

Managing partners of the BCP include Travis County, the City of Austin, the Lower Colorado River Authority, Travis Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy of Texas and private landowners. These partners are responsible for patrolling and managing the land and conducting biological monitoring and research.



Volunteer Opportunities

- Guided Hikes
- Community Outreach
- Patrol and Inspection
- Land Stewardship
- Trail Maintenance
- Environmental Education
- Facilities and Infrastructure
- Information Management
- Environmental Monitoring and Research



Volunteer Status

We welcome you as a volunteer to the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. Your volunteer work with the Preserve is appreciated. All duties you perform for the Preserve are performed strictly on a volunteer basis. You are not an employee of Travis County and do not receive any of the benefits employees of Travis County receive. As a volunteer, you are not compensated for the volunteer work you provide. No employee of the Preserve, the Transportation and Natural Resources Department, or Travis County has the authority to modify your status as a volunteer. Nothing in this Volunteer Handbook is intended to create an employment relationship.

Nondiscrimination

Travis County prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, age, religion, sex, national origin, disability, veteran status, and sexual orientation. This includes harassment based on prohibited protected classes. Volunteers should conduct themselves in a professional manner and avoid behavior that is personally offensive. Volunteers shall not

conduct themselves in a manner that upsets morale and interferes with work efficiency. If volunteers witness harassment, they should immediately report harassment to the Volunteer Coordinator and/or County staff.

Confidentiality

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a single staff member, volunteer or other person or involves overall preserve business. Examples of privileged information that must remain confidential are gate combinations and locations of caves and archeological areas. If you have any question about the confidentiality of any information, you should first contact the Volunteer Coordinator.



Acceptance and Appointment

Volunteers may participate in short or long term projects. Every volunteer shall complete a Travis County Release of Indemnity and Liability and Emergency Contact form before your volunteer assignment. Volunteers serving longer than two weeks also must complete a Travis County BCP Volunteer Application and Service Agreement.

Due to the physical nature of many volunteer projects, some activities may not be appropriate for all volunteers. Travis County reserves the right to limit volunteer activities.

Background checks are not conducted for BCP volunteers for general land management. However, any volunteer who will be working unsupervised with children will be subject to a background check.

Guided and Independent Volunteer Projects

Volunteers may work on Guided or Independent Projects. Basically, Guided Projects are projects directly supervised by a Project Leader (Travis County staff working with the Volunteer Coordinator). Guided projects are often short-term, group projects. In contrast, Independent Projects require a longer service commitment from volunteers and more training. Although volunteers who work on Independent Projects will work more autonomously, they will still report to the Volunteer Coordinator.

For Guided Projects, the Project Leader is responsible for having all volunteers sign a tracking sheet and complete the Release of Liability and Indemnity Agreement and Emergency Contact form before starting work. The Project Leader also has the following responsibilities: providing access through preserve gates, orienting volunteers to the

BCP, train the volunteers about project duties and safety, providing guidance, and monitoring safety and progress of the volunteer activity.

In addition to the Release of Indemnity and Liability and Emergency Contact form, volunteers involved with Independent Projects will also complete a Travis County BCP Volunteer Application and Service Agreement. Their Service Agreement will include their Project Description or Project Proposal describing the details of the volunteer's Independent Project.

Volunteers receive orientation, training and guidance from the Volunteer Coordinator to fulfill the needs of their Independent Project. They are entrusted to manage themselves according to the guidelines detailed in this Handbook and maintain communication as is required with staff. Volunteers doing Independent Projects are accepting responsibility for their own personal safety while conducting their project.

Service Agreement

Volunteers for projects lasting mVolunteer Coordinator and Travis County staff involved with the project. Agreements will vary depending on the project description and availability of individual volunteers. ore than two weeks will sign a Service Agreement. The Service Agreement describes the volunteer's project responsibilities, project term, total number of hours expected to be necessary, schedule, and contact information for the

Volunteer Guidance

Volunteers who sign a Service Agreement will report to the Volunteer Coordinator. The role of the Volunteer Coordinator is to track the volunteer's schedule, monitor access and activities on the preserve, and

arrange for the volunteer to receive training, safety equipment, first aid kit, tools, supplies, and necessary information.

The Volunteer Coordinator will arrange regular meetings to discuss the volunteer's work schedule and projects. The Coordinator must ensure that a radio and/or cell phone and the volunteer's Emergency Contact form are at the work site at all times.

The volunteer is required to complete the necessary project and safety training and to communicate with the Volunteer Coordinator each week to confirm their schedule and to discuss the status and responsibilities of their project.



Youth Volunteer and/or Service Learning

A parent or guardian is required to complete Travis County's Release of Liability and Indemnity Agreement and Emergency Contact form for volunteers less than 18-years of age prior to starting work. Service agreements for minors require signature of parents or guardians. Students volunteering for service learning credit hours for their school must submit the school name and contact information before volunteering.



Volunteer Orientation and Project Training

All volunteers must complete orientation and training for their project assignment. This handbook provides an overview of the BCP, its mission, history and goals. The orientation is designed to provide a framework for volunteering at the preserve. Project specific training is provided, which details the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the volunteer duties.

Safety and Liability

Travis County aims to provide a safe and healthy environment for all volunteers. The County provides complete instructions covering safe working methods and makes available special equipment to protect volunteers against hazards. Safety Training will follow the points listed on the Safety Checklist for Volunteer Projects including key points such as hydration, sun protection, wilderness hazards, and emergency procedures.

Volunteers using tools and equipment will receive training for their proper use and care. Personal protective equipment (PPE) will be provided as appropriate. If volunteers are approved to use their own tools, including power tools, they must wear the appropriate PPE.

Safety begins with the volunteer. Volunteers must observe safety rules required for their assignment, use safety equipment provided, and practice safety at all times. Volunteers are required to report unsafe conditions to the Volunteer Coordinator and/or other Travis County staff.

The Volunteer Coordinator or Project Leader will identify the location of the first aid kit at the work site. Volunteers with allergies (such as to bee stings or fire ants) requiring special medication should be prepared as necessary. Hospitals and emergency clinics are located approximately 25 minutes or more away.

If a volunteer is injured in the course of the volunteer's service, it is important that the volunteer notify the Volunteer Coordinator or other Travis County staff immediately. The Volunteer Coordinator should ensure that a Volunteer Incident Report is completed within 24 hours of the injury.

Dress Code

Volunteers should dress appropriately for the conditions and performance of their duties. Individual volunteers will be informed of the dress standard for their duties at the time of assignment.

Volunteers who work as support in an office situation will dress according to the code of that particular office.

Volunteers working outside on the preserve must wear appropriate footwear for hiking on rugged terrain; ankle support is vital. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts protect the skin. When it is hot outside, select loose-fitting clothing made from lightweight and light-colored fabric to keep cool.

Other supplies that volunteers should bring include sunscreen, insect repellant, hat, sunglasses, and drinking water. Dust masks or bandannas may help volunteers prone to allergies in some situations.



Preserve Access

Gates to the preserve have combination locks to secure the property. Project Leaders provide access for volunteers participating in Guided Projects. Volunteers involved with Independent Projects are provided with gate combinations and are responsible for immediately closing and locking gates behind them. Combinations to locks are confidential information. If a volunteer discloses gate combinations without authorization, he or she could be asked to leave the Volunteer Program.

Volunteers are not allowed to operate County vehicles. All volunteers are required to provide their own transportation to a pre-arranged meeting place or the location of a project. Volunteers driving on the BCP should remain on designated roadways, watch for wildlife crossing the road, and travel less than 15 mph.

Absenteeism

Volunteer attendance is important to the operation of each program. We ask that volunteers notify Volunteer Coordinator with as much in advance notice as possible if they are unable to be present on their scheduled day.



Guidelines for Working on the Preserve

The BCP protects habitat for endangered species and other native plants and animals of the Texas Hill Country. The preserve also contributes to clean air, clean water and quality of life for all Central Texas residents.

When participating in a project on the BCP, a volunteer should:

- have access to a cell phone and know your project address and location;
- obtain approval from your supervisor before bringing companions;
- dispose of trash or debris only in designated receptacles;
- leave bicycles and pets at home (guide dogs require special permission;)
- refrain from smoking to prevent wildfires;
- leave natural materials where they are found including, but not limited to: antlers, bones, flowers, seeds, whole plants, historic articles, artifacts, fossils, or rocks; unless under the direct approval of staff; and
- refrain from unauthorized use of birdsong playback equipment when volunteering at the preserve.

Guidelines for Volunteer Conduct

Volunteers should conduct themselves professionally and avoid discrimination and prohibited harassment. Volunteers may be asked to leave the Volunteer Program at the discretion of Travis County for inappropriate conduct. Volunteers should avoid inappropriate conduct, such as the following:

- theft or inappropriate removal or possession of Travis County property or that of any volunteer, staff, agent or visitor, including failing to cooperate fully in any investigation;
- altering Travis County reports or records;

- volunteering under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs and/or illegal or unauthorized possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs while in the volunteer environment;
- creating a disturbance on Travis County premises, at sponsored activities or in areas that could jeopardize the safety of other wildlife or people;
- improper use of Travis County's property or property owned by any other individual or organization;
- lack of cooperation, or other disrespectful conduct;
- inappropriate use of telephones, computer equipment or systems, mail system, e-mail system, facsimile machines, or other Travis County-owned equipment. Inappropriate use includes the following:
    - viewing materials without permission
    - unauthorized logging into accounts
    - sending mass e-mails/voicemails or chain letters
    - unauthorized personal use
    - use for illegal activities
    - to threaten or harass
    - posting solicitations or advertisements;
- unauthorized disclosure of Travis County proprietary or confidential information, including providing access information to unapproved people; and
- trespassing on the BCP, which is defined as access at unapproved locations and/or times or bringing unapproved people or animals onto the BCP.

If Travis County staff has concerns about a volunteer's work on a particular project, they should communicate those concerns to the volunteer with consideration of privacy and confidentiality whenever possible. If communication with the volunteer does not correct the situation, staff should fill out a Volunteer Incident Report and communicate with the Volunteer Coordinator to determine appropriate next steps.

All attempts will be made to address conflicts, with assistance for conflict resolution if necessary. The goal is to resolve conflicts, have all parties learn from the situation, and improve how all parties continue to work together.



Volunteer Conflict Resolution

Volunteers who are unhappy or dissatisfied with a project, a fellow volunteer, or a staff member are encouraged to communicate with the Volunteer Coordinator or Natural Resources Program Manager. The

Volunteer Coordinator will meet with the volunteer to discuss the problem and possible solutions.

Emergency Closings

Travis County strives to ensure the safety of all volunteers and our staff. If a volunteer event is cancelled or Travis County offices should close, the Volunteer Coordinator will notify volunteers scheduled to perform service via email and/or telephone of the closing. In the event of inclement weather or other emergencies, the volunteer should contact the Volunteer Coordinator to determine if scheduled activities are canceled.



Use of Travis County Property

The County provides volunteers with tools and equipment as is necessary and available to participate in a project. Volunteers are expected to carry and use tools carefully and as instructed so as not to endanger themselves or others, cause damage to the property, or intentionally break or render a tool unusable.

If a volunteer is participating in an Independent Project where they use Travis County equipment, they will be asked to read the Equipment Loan Policy and sign the Equipment Check- Out Form with the Volunteer Coordinator. The form specifies condition of equipment and the date of equipment return. This form will also alert staff to maintenance or repair needs after use.

Volunteer Use of Personal Property

Occasionally, volunteers may offer to use or prefer to use their own equipment or materials for a project. This is allowed as long as protective equipment meets the County standards for safety, volunteers are responsible for their property at all times, and volunteers accept the risk of use of their property. The County will not be responsible for the misuse of volunteer property by the owner or another volunteer, damage incurred in the process of carrying out a volunteer project, damage incurred by the dropping or submerging in water, damage from exposure to climatic elements, or loss due to theft.

Volunteer Records

The Volunteer Coordinator maintains records on each volunteer throughout the service period. Records include:

- dates of volunteer service
- positions held
- duties performed
- training attended and
- awards/recognitions received



Volunteer records, including the Travis County BCP Volunteer Application and background checks, are confidential.

Feedback

Volunteers receive periodic feedback about their work on assigned projects. The purpose of feedback is to enhance the relationship between the volunteer, staff and Travis County and to allow both the volunteer and Coordinator to suggest changes. It is expected that the volunteer will offer feedback on the status of their assigned projects as well as any ideas on enhancement of the project.

Recognition

Travis County recognizes the importance of volunteers' contributions to the County and the BCP.

- First, volunteers are recognized with service and outstanding achievement awards.
- Second, all volunteers are invited to attend volunteer and staff appreciation events.
- Third, volunteer contributions are highlighted with articles and photographs on the BCP Volunteer Web page (www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/bccp/bcp_volunteer.asp) and in newsletters.
- Fourth, volunteers have opportunities for continuing education and participation in community events. In conclusion, continuing recognition of volunteers is vital and will occur throughout the year.



For more information about the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator at (512) 219-6190 ext.7. Visit our website at:

http://www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/bccp/bcp_volunteer.asp

and become a fan at:

"Balcones Canyonlands Preserve" on facebook.com.



I have read and agree to adhere to the guidelines set forth in the Travis County Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Volunteer Handbook.

_____

Signature of Volunteer Date

_____

Signature of Parent/Guardian of Minor Date

_____

Signature of Volunteer Coordinator Date