BALCONES CANYONLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN

Annual Report
FY 2002

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 six years since the permit's inception, 26,326 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. Ten Participation Certificates were issued in FY2002, generating over $500,000 in Preserve land acquisition funds. USFWS directed mitigation payments provided an additional $1,500 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. In FY2002, a total of $10,000,000 in federal HCP funds was awarded to Travis County to support land acquisition within the Preserve.

Preserve Acquisition and Management Expenditures

The City of Austin and Travis County acquired over 1040 acres of habitat through fee simple purchases and Conservation Easements in FY2002, and continued negotiations to acquire remaining key tracts within the Preserve system. Expenditures related to Preserve land acquisition totaled over $12,173,000 in FY2002. The Permit Holders and cooperating entities expended a combined total of greater than $1,427,305 for operations and maintenance of Preserve lands in FY2002.

Public Use and Habitat Management

Public uses permitted on selected tracts prior to the establishment of the BCP continued through FY2002. 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 continues. 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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E: Abbruzzese, Carlo. 2002 Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo Monitoring Program.
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H: Hardy, Dan. Initial Findings of Investigations concerning *Palomedes* sp. Butterflies at Hamilton Pool Preserve, Travis County, Texas.
I: Koehler, Donald L. and William A. Conrad. City of Austin White-tailed Deer Management Program.
J: Loomis Austin. 2002 Golden-cheeked Warbler (*Dendrioca chrysoparia*) survey of the Wheless Preserve.

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