BCCP Administration	
Public Participation	Twenty-seven Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) applications were received and processed, and four Participation Certificates were issued. A total of $54,450.00 in mitigation payments were received and split 50:50 between Travis County and the City of Austin.
Land Acquisition	In December, one additional acre of land was donated by Concordia University for inclusion in the Concordia conservation easement, bringing the easement total to 252.65 acres.
Personnel	Mickey Leland Intern, Corbyn McEachern, completed his internship in December. In January, Natural Resources Specialist, Travis Clark, was promoted to a Natural Resources Supervisor position. Rebecca Woodward was hired as a Volunteer Coordinator and started in February. Three temporary Natural Resources Techs were hired to help with bird surveys and other management activities. Jake Olson and Alexandra Ciongoli started in February, and Jennifer Reidy started in March.
BCCP Annual Report	The FY2022 BCCP Annual Report was submitted to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) in January. It can be viewed at: https://www.traviscountytx.gov/tnr/nr/2022-annual-report.
National HCP Coalition Conference	The National Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Coalition Conference was held in Austin on October 25-27th. This conference was an opportunity for people who work on HCPs across the nation to gather and discuss policy, HCP development and implementation, and management practices. Eight Natural Resources staff were able to attend. Staff also assisted in planning and coordinating a field trip to the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), which was attended by about 40 conference participants.
Rare and Endangered Resources Management	
Golden-cheeked warblers and Black-capped vireos	The first golden-cheeked warbler to arrive on the Travis County BCP was documented on March 6th. Staff began intensive plot, enumeration, and presence/absence surveys in mid-March. The first black-capped vireo was observed on the Travis County BCP on March 24th.

Karst Invertebrates	Staff performed fall season faunal surveys at eight BCCP-listed caves. Winter season surveys were conducted at five BCCP-listed caves and two additional endangered species caves. Fall season cave cricket exit counts were performed at six BCCP-listed caves. Winter season exit counts were conducted at five BCCP-listed caves and one additional endangered species cave. Travis County and City of Austin BCP staff collaborated to provide additional information to the FWS pertaining to the status of six endangered karst invertebrates undergoing 5-year reviews. Staff conducted a LiDAR analysis of the Kotrla Unit and located seven unknown karst features, four of which qualify as caves. A contractor, Zara Environmental, assessed features on the Kotrla Unit and provided a report on eight previously known karst features and nine newly discovered karst features, of which six qualify as caves. They also provided a report on their LiDAR analysis of the grounds around the BCP Building to locate unknown caves for future construction or interpretive purposes.
Salamanders	In October, the FWS initiated a status review to determine if the Pedernales River Springs salamander warrants protections under the Endangered Species Act. This salamander has been documented in the section of Pedernales River within Travis County, including on the BCP. A Travis County research permit was issued to University of Texas professor Dr. Tom Devitt, which allows for the collection of water samples on County property to look for environmental DNA (eDNA) from salamanders. eDNA is a relatively new technology to survey for hard-to-find aquatic species. This study will be conducted in collaboration with County BCP staff.
Plant and Animal Control	
White-tailed deer	Staff harvested 17 deer on the BCP in December and January; five from the Cypress Creek Macrosite and 12 from the Kotrla Unit. The meat was donated through the Hunters for the Hungry Program.
Feral Hogs	Staff trapped and harvested three feral hogs from the Kotrla Unit in March.

Invasive Ants	Spring red imported fire ant surveys were conducted at seven BCCP-listed caves. Two canopy arthropod collections occurred in March at the beginning of the golden-cheeked warbler breeding season. Monitoring of the Collins and Franklin tracts is still ongoing to document any resurgence of tawny crazy ants. University of Texas researcher Dr. Ed LeBrun, continued inoculation and monitoring of the rediscovered tawny crazy ant population at No Rent and Weldon Caves. Travis County staff conducted ant density sampling within those caves during the winter faunal surveys. Dr. Ed LeBrun provided a presentation about tawny crazy ant research to the BCCP Coordinating Committee in December.
Invasive Plants	Staff, contractors, and volunteers removed 16,550 invasive plants from 15 BCP tracts. The Texas Conservation Corps expended 735 hours of labor on the removal of invasive plants.
Land Stewardship	
Storm Damage Cleanup	Winter Ice Storm Mara arrived in Austin on January 30th, bringing with it heavy ice that caused significant tree damage and power outages. The storm lasted several days, and the tree damage on the BCP was catastrophic. Staff spent the month of February clearing downed trees and limbs from shaded fuel breaks, roads, facilities, fencelines, and cave openings. Three tree service companies were hired to help with debris cleanup, and the Texas Conservation Corps provided a week of volunteer service. Despite the effort, much debris cleanup remains to be done and cleanup will be an ongoing effort.
Habitat Restoration	Brush management was conducted by staff and contractors on 16 acres of black-capped vireo habitat within the Jollyville Unit. Overgrown vegetation was cut back to maintain the habitat in the mid-successional stage preferred by vireos. A habitat restoration project was initiated on the Medway tract to restore a degraded quarry area by reducing rainwater runoff, retaining soils, and increasing vegetative cover. A contractor installed 245 feet of conservation terraces, and staff installed 500 feet of brush berms during February and March. Staff then planted about 50 trees on the conservation terraces and seeded the terraces with grasses and forbes. Thirty trees were planted on the Greenshores conservation easement as mitigation for trees lost during the construction of a water main pipeline. Travis County Environmental Quality staff oversaw a project to restore North Hollow Pond on the Wild Basin Preserve. This pond had filled with silt and unwanted vegetation, and a contractor was hired to remove the vegetation and silt, reshape and seed the banks, and repair the outlet.

Fence and Road Construction and Repairs	A contractor completed 4,850 ft of new fence on the east side of the Flying K tract and started another 9,150 ft section of new fencing on the west side. Repairs were made to the boundary fence on the Lucas and Stark's North Mine tracts, and the Lime Creek Unit from damage caused by vehicles driven into the fences. A contractor was hired to install a new Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible parking space adjacent to the ADA accessible restroom at the Wild Basin Preserve. The contractor also installed some speed bumps along the driveway. In February, construction began on a culvert replacement project on the New Life tract. This work is being done by a contractor.
Buildings	A shed adjacent to the Snowden House was renovated to better serve volunteer activities. The shed is used for storage and has an ADA accessible restroom. Jackson and McElhaney Architects presented design plans for the BCP Visitor Center to Commissioner's Court on February 7th.
Conservation Easements	Fifteen annual reviews were conducted on BCP conservation easements. One landowner was non-compliant with their easement.
Wildlife Preparedness	Staff conducted winter storm Uri damage clean up in the shaded fuel breaks at the Cuevas, Grandview Hills, Vireo Ridge, Steiner Ranch, Webb, Toops, and Wild Basin tracts. Lake Travis Fire and Rescue was contracted to maintain existing shaded fuel breaks at the Steiner Ranch conservation easement, and the Webb, Trails End, Canyon Vista, Lucas and SAS tracts. In addition, the Texas Conservation Corps began work on the Greenshores and Medway tracts. Staff conducted some brush pile burning on the Jollyville Unit in November.
Utility Infrastructure Corridors	The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), Austin Energy, and the Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) conducted routine inspections and vegetation clearing along their transmission lines which cross through the BCP. LCRA also repaired a telecommunication fiber line that was damaged during Winter Storm Mara, conducted pilot hole drilling, and repaired some road damage on the BCP.
Water Quality	Staff monitored water quality at two sites on or near the BCP using Environmental Integrity Index methodology.

Patrol and Law Enforcement	
Trespass and Property Damage	The BCP Building and surrounding grounds were the site of several incidents of vandalism and theft from December through March. There were three incidents of fence damage due to vehicle collisions on the Lucas and Stark's North Mine tracts and the Lime Creek Unit. There were two incidents of illegal tree cutting on the BCP. Two incidents of criminal mischief involving trespass and dumping at party sites were discovered on the Steiner Ranch conservation easement and the Ribelin tract. The sites were cleaned up by staff. Dumping of landscape material and trespassing are ongoing issues.
Law Enforcement Training	The Travis County Sheriff's Office, including their SWAT and K-9 Units, used the vacant BCP Building and surrounding grounds to conduct a series of trainings from December through March.
Outreach/Volunteers	
See *BCP Partner Education Summary Reports for FY2023 First Quarter and FY2023 Second Quarter*	

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Tree damage caused by Winter Storm Mara was extensive. In this photo, staff are clearing a BCP road of fallen trees.



This newly installed conservation terrace on the Medway tract is part of an effort to restore a degraded area by reducing rainwater runoff and retaining water and soil on the landscape.



An ADA accessible parking space was installed in the Wild Basin Preserve parking lot adjacent to the ADA accessible restroom.





Jackson and McElhaney Architects presented design plans for the BCP Visitor Center to Commissioner's Court on February 7th. These illustrations show renderings of the south side (top) and north side (bottom) of the future Visitor Center.

BCCP Administration	
Public Participation	Thirty-one Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) applications were received and processed, and ten Participation Certificates were issued. A total of $27,349.00 in mitigation payments were received and split 50:50 between Travis County and the City of Austin.
Personnel	In May, Natural Resources Tech, Sam Berg, was promoted to a Natural Resources Supervisor position. Jaya Torres was hired as a Natural Resources Tech-Interprative Guide in May. Kennedy Diamond worked as a Mickey Leland intern from June through August. In June, Natural Resources Tech, Nancy Sandoval, was promoted to a Natural Resources Specialist position. Seasonal Natural Resources Techs, Jake Olson and and Alexandra Ciongoli, completed their term in August and Jennifer Reidy completed her term in September.
Rare and Endangered Resources Management	
Golden-cheeked warblers and Black-capped vireos	Natural Resources staff (Staff) conducted golden-cheeked warbler intensive plot, enumeration, and presence/absence surveys during March through June and black-capped vireo surveys were conducted from April through August. Travis County and City of Austin staff color banded 17 golden-cheeked warblers and 33 black-capped vireos on Travis County BCP and Parks properties. Color banding aids in identification of indviduals while surveying (see Photos 1 and 2).
Karst Invertebrates	Staff performed spring season faunal surveys at seven BCCP-listed caves. Summer season surveys were conducted at nine BCCP-listed caves and one potential substitution cave. Spring season cave cricket exit counts were performed at six BCCP-listed caves. Summer season exit counts were conducted at six BCCP-listed caves and one additional endangered species cave. Travis County and City of Austin staff participated in a BCCP Karst Completion meeting in August. Travis County and City of Austin staff set traps in the pools within Stark's North Mine to see if collections could be made for salamanders and aquatic invertebrates. Water samples were also taken and a drip monitor was installed. Contractor, Zara Environmental, started additional analyses of karst features on the Kotrla Unit and submitted specimens collected on the property for taxonomic identification. Two of the specimens appear to each be separate, new pseudoscorpion species.

Salamanders	A Travis County research permit was issued to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service researcher, Peter Diaz, to access Travis County BCP and Parks properties to collect salamander DNA samples.
Plant and Animal Management	
Bird Banding	Staff established a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding station on the New Life tract and completed a pilot season of banding in August. MAPS is a a continent-wide collaborative effort among public agencies, non-governmental groups, and individuals to assist the conservation of birds and their habitats through bird banding. Staff captured, banded, and collected data on 110 individual birds including 16 different species (see Photos 3 and 4).
Brown-headed cowbirds	Natural Resources staff, Parks staff, and volunteers operated five cowbird traps on or near the BCP from April through June.
White-tailed deer	Staff completed camera deer surveys in September. Deer spotlight surveys began in September and will continue through October.
Feral Hogs	Staff trapped and harvested 43 feral hogs: two from the Kotrla Unit and 41 from the Flying K conservation easement adjacent to the Kotrla Unit.
Invasive Ants	Red imported fire ant surveys and treatments were conducted at nine BCCP-listed caves and two additional endangered species caves. Staff completed the final round of a five-year study to collect canopy arthropods on the Collin's tract during the golden-cheeked warblers' breeding season. This study looked at how tawny crazy ants may impact the warbler's food supply. Staff conducted in-cave sampling of tawny crazy ants at Weldon and No Rent Caves. Dr. Ed LeBrun's lab continued to evaluate the establishment and spread of the microsporidian pathogen within the population.
Invasive Plants	Staff removed more than 3,380 non-native invasive plants from 17 tracts. Additionally, wisteria vine was treated on approximately 0.5 acre of the Bunten tract.
Oak Wilt	Several new oak wilt sites were discovered on the BCP in September and staff are researching mitigation options. Staff are continuing to analyze aerial imagery and field verify other suspicious oak die-off areas for evidence of oak wilt.

Land Stewardship	
Habitat Restoration	Staff planted about 50 native trees and seedlings at the Medway restoration site in April. Staff and volunteers completed several workdays over the summer, constructing brush berms and rock check dams to further prevent erosion and run-off. A contractor spread compost and native mulch over the Medway berm/swale restoration area in July, completing construction of the pilot Conservation Terrace project. Staff collected, processed and stored native plant seeds. Staff have also started a pilot native plant propagation project and are currently growing 300+ native tree and shrub seedlings to use in future biodiversity and restoration projects.
Fence and Road Construction and Repairs	A contractor completed construction of 9,150 feet of new fence on the west side of the Flying K tract. Numerous fence repairs were made by staff and contractors to fix damage caused by fallen trees and limbs or from vehicle collisions. Construction was completed on a culvert replacement project on the New Life tract (see Photos 5 and 6).
Buildings	Jackson and McElhaney Architects moved from the design phase of the future Travis County BCP Visitor Center to the development of construction plans and permitting.
Conservation Easements	Two annual reviews were conducted on BCP conservation easements. One landowner was non-compliant with their easement but the issue was resolved.
Wildfire Mitigation	During the summer, staff conducted storm damage assessments and initial site prep in shaded fuel break treatment areas within the wildland-urban interface. Staff and Lake Travis Fire and Rescue resumed storm damage clean-up and shaded fuel break maintenance in September. Travis County applied to the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds to conduct fuel reduction projects on the BCP and County Parks.
Utility Infrastructure Corridors	The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) worked on a winter storm hardening construction project on their Marshall Ford to Spicewood to McNeil transmission lines which run through the BCP. Austin Energy and the Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) conducted routine inspections and vegetation clearing along their transmission lines which cross through the BCP.
Water Quality	Staff monitored water quality at three sites on or near the BCP using Environmental Integrity Index methodology. A water leak was discovered on the Canyon Vista tract in May. Staff notified Austin Water and they sent a crew to repair the leaking pipe.

Patrol and Law Enforcement	
Trespass and Property Damage	There were two incidents of fence damage due to vehicle collisions on the Lime Creek Ranch and Trails End tracts. Trespassing, dumping, and tree cutting along the BCP boundary are ongoing issues. Staff worked with neighbors to resolve issues and, when necessary, persue restitution for damages.
Law Enforcement Training	The Travis County Sheriff's Office, the Austin Police Department, and Williamson County SWAT used the vacant BCP Building and surrounding grounds to conduct a series of trainings.
Outreach/Volunteers	
See *BCP Partner Education Summary FY23 Biannual Report for April 1 – September 30, 2023*	

Photos 1-4: Staff banded birds during the spring and summer to aid in the identification of individual golden-cheeked warblers and black-capped vireos during surveys, and to monitor productivity of resident birds at a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station.



Photo 1. Juvenile golden-cheeked warbler.



Photo 2. Female black-capped vireo.



Photo 3. Male painted bunting.



Photo 4. Jeremy Hull removing a Carolina wren from a mist net.

Photos 5-6: Construction was completed on a culvert replacement project on the New Life tract. Photo 5 shows the new culvert from the south side of the road and Photo 6 shows it from the north side of the road.



Photo 5.



Photo 6.