LOWER COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY

Annual Status Report for the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan
October 1st, 2022 - September 30th, 2023.

Mitigation Credits Used

The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), on behalf of LCRA Transmission Services Corporation (LCRA TSC), debited 16.5 acres from its mitigation bank balance between October 2022 and September 2023 for clearing on the following projects: 1) Marshall Ford to McNeil (T197) transmission line for emergency fiber work between structures 31 and 39 on the Travis County Ribelin and City of Austin Kent Butler Balcones Canyonlands Preserves; 2) Lakeway to Marble Falls (T497) Transmission Line Storm Hardening Project; and 3) Marshall Ford to Spicewood to McNeil Transmission Line Storm Hardening Project. An additional 0.2 acres was debited for clearing for the new Austin Sunshine Camp residential home located on LCRA-owned Turkey Bend Recreational Area Park. A total of 16.7 acres was debited. LCRA has 206.63 mitigation credits remaining.

Management Highlights

LCRA continued to manage approximately 400 acres as a portion of the preserve system on the McGregor and Westcave Preserves. Management activities for these LCRA preserves continued to focus on natural resource research and management, access management, and stewardship promotion.

McGregor Preserve

Plateau Land and Wildlife Management conducted a deer survey at the McGregor Preserve in September 2022. The final report recommended harvesting two to three deer. The estimated density on the McGregor Preserve is 13.25 acres per deer for an estimated total of 27 deer. LCRA did not attempt to harvest deer at the McGregor Preserve this past season and instead concentrated efforts on properties with greater densities.

Multiple site visits were conducted on the McGregor Preserve after the ice storm in early February 2023 to assess the trails, roads, and fuel breaks. LCRA staff found downed limbs and the need for minor gate repairs. Clean up was beyond what the Natural Resource Conservation (NRC) staff could complete before the breeding season began in March 2023. NRC plans to wait until after the breeding season to clean up the preserve.

Westcave Preserve

- Preserve maintenance was on-going and included trail inspections, trail work, view shed clearing, invasive plant removal, nest box maintenance, tree trimming, boundary inspections, boundary maintenance, and building maintenance.
- Westcave Preserve staff continues to collect data for Night Sky Quality readings.
- Game cameras were installed in the canyon, off trail, to detect the presence/absence of non-native animals. At least ten sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) were detected.
- The bigroot springparsley (*Cymopterus macrorhizus*) was recently discovered in one area of Westcave's Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) lands by Westcave conservation staff and was added to Westcave's flora and fauna database.
- An injured Mexican free-tailed bat was found and taken to the Austin Bat Refuge. The bat tested positive for rabies.
- LCRA installed a turbidity/temperature antenna on the tower that houses the Motus Wildlife Tracking System antennas above staff offices at Westcave Preserve to measure the Pedernales River. The antenna receives a signal from a device at the bridge of the river on the side closest to the preserve.
- Programming included bird, night, wellness, hikes, star parties and yoga.
- Research programs throughout the year consisted of:
    - Monthly water sampling was conducted to check water quality at Heinz Branch. Results continue to be within a normal range and are reported to LCRA.
    - A biannual karst invertebrate survey was conducted in Hammetts cave in partnership with Travis County. All species were recorded and monitored. Target species include the *Texella* and *Tayshaneta* genus species. Of those two target species, nine *Texella* and twelve *Tayshaneta* were recorded. In addition, thirteen other karst invertebrate species were recorded during this survey.
    - Golden-cheeked warbler (GCWA) surveys were conducted by Westcave Preserve staff. Preparations such as survey trail trimming and flagging were made prior to the start of the GCWA survey season. The first GCWA heard on property was March 9, 2023. To date, three confirmed individuals were detected on the property, with one being previously banded in 2022 (named Fluffy, with a band combination of

White/Black:Blue/Silver). Three unique territories were identified, two of which were successful. Three brown-headed cowbirds were dispatched during the GCWA season.

- Volunteers conducted bi-weekly dragonfly watch as part of the Migratory Dragonfly Partnership Citizen Science Program.
- Weekly to biweekly nest checks were made by Westcave Preserve staff and interns as part of the Cornell Lab Ornithology Citizen Science Program called NestWatch.
- Westcave Preserve staff and volunteers monitored each bat house at Westcave as part of a Bat Emergence Count. Emergence counts have been a weekly effort with the most individuals being over 500 in the mega bat house. The Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) has been recorded at each bat house. This data is reported to Merlin Tuttle Bat Conservation International.
- During the month of September, chimney swift data was collected. Fifteen were recorded returning to the chimney swift tower and the data submitted to eBird.

Expenditures

LCRA expenditures (10/1/2022 to 9/30/2023): $7,396.00*

*Does not include expenditures by Westcave Preserve Corporation