Law Enforcement Summary
Travis County Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Tracts
FY2002 Annual Report

Travis County Natural Resources

January 2003

Introduction

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) was established in accordance with the terms and conditions of a permit (the Permit) issued under Section 10(a)1(b) of the Endangered Species Act jointly issued to Travis County and the City of Austin by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in May 1996. Under the Permit, individual agencies are responsible for management and maintenance of their respective preserve tracts. Law enforcement is one of many aspects of land management that helps to protect the resources of the BCP. In FY2002, two commissioned Peace Officers were assigned to the BCP to help with law enforcement on the increasing acreage (approximately 3,100 acres) of County lands dedicated to endangered species habitat management. The BCP Rangers are responsible for protecting all natural and cultural resources of the County's BCP lands, including protection of endangered species and their habitat.

Roles and Responsibilities

BCP Ranger roles, responsibilities and best practices were established and initiated in FY2002. BCP Rangers received intensive training about the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) and the BCP, including protected species and biologically sensitive locations, successful public interaction strategies for relating preserve goals and access restrictions, locations of preserve boundaries, as well as specific trespass, protection, and law enforcement concerns.

The primary duties of Travis County BCP Rangers were established:

- Enforce all applicable statutes related to the preserve, including trespass and unauthorized activities within the preserve, vandalism, etc.
- Travis County's BCP Rangers are required to maintain certified Emergency Medical Technician status. BCP Rangers respond to EMS calls both outside and inside the BCP.
- Record and track law enforcement issues related to the BCP to better direct future law enforcement efforts.
- Communicate law enforcement issues to Preserve managers, field staff, BCP partners, and the BCP Coordinating Committee.
- Coordinate Travis County law enforcement efforts with BCP managing partners and with other agencies having jurisdiction (TPWD Game Wardens, USFWS Division of Law Enforcement, etc.).
- Become familiar with preserve tract features such as roads, trails, boundary lines, signs, power lines, springs, caves, fences, gates and adjacent neighbors (to facilitate response to emergency or other reported issues).

- Become familiar with the species and habitats being protected.
- Monitor damage to BCP natural features and infrastructure, including reporting, investigation and follow up responsibilities.
- Perform regular boundary patrols on all tracts.
- Locate tract boundaries and determine where fences, gates and signs should be located.
- Help create and maintain trails and roads and access points as needed for monitoring, patrol, and emergency response purposes.
- Assist with installation of boundary fences, gates, and signs.
- Locate, report, investigate, and help correct illegal dumping matters.
- Enforce Steiner Ranch Preserve trail rules (no trespassing off trail, no dogs off leash, etc.).
- Help close unauthorized trails.
- Assist with BCP volunteer work events including black-capped vireo habitat manipulation, non-native plant removal, installation of temporary fencing, etc.
- Community education and outreach activities including increasing visibility of Travis County Law Enforcement staff, meeting preserve neighbors and assisting with tours, presentations, youth and community group activities, etc.
- Monitor and address development impacts to the preserve. This included coordinating with contractors to prevent heavy equipment encroachment onto preserve lands during construction on adjacent developments, resolving erosion issues from uphill construction, documenting and coordinating removal of construction debris on preserve land, and addressing fence-line neighbor issues such as construction of gates and trails into the preserve, tree cutting within the preserve, etc.
- Assist with removal or control of problem or feral animals in accordance with Travis County's Wildlife and Vegetation Management Guidelines and other applicable statutes.

During FY2002, BCP Rangers performed the duties listed above within the preserve. Some specific activities in performing these duties included:

Marking boundaries

As many of Travis County's BCP tracts have been recently acquired, some boundaries are poorly marked and some are unfenced. Rangers continued to locate and mark BCP boundaries, install preserve boundary signs and no trespassing signs at entrances, and assist with installation of boundary fences and gates.

Trespass

Rangers worked to reduce trespass concerns throughout the BCP tracts. Many preserve tracts are adjacent to dense urban development, and trespass problems are a focus of concern. Increasing numbers of trespass incidents on the Steiner Ranch BCP tract continued, with unauthorized motorcycle and mountain bike access a primary issue. Rangers conducted back-of-lot surveys of Steiner Ranch Eastridge Valley and Eastridge Summit subdivisions to monitor deed restriction violations involving unsecured gated access onto BCP property. Rangers responded to ongoing trespass issues at Wild Basin Preserve and repaired damaged boundary fencing and posted "No Trespassing" signage. Boundary encroachment and poaching have also been areas of concern on BCP tracts in FY2002.

Education

Rangers actively participate in education and outreach activities for Travis County residents concerning the BCP and the County's efforts to protect the native wildlife of the area. BCP Rangers provided several educational opportunities throughout the year, including coordinating volunteer trail maintenance and work events with Boy Scout troops and participation in the annual Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Wildlife EXPO. BCP Rangers assisted in developing FY2003 BCP environmental education programs for Steiner Ranch and Laura Bush Elementary Schools. Rangers are often participate in the Homeowners Associations meetings for neighborhoods adjacent to Travis County preserve lands, and are available to meet with individual neighbors about concerns such as property damage caused by feral hogs as well as possible methods of control.

Patrolling/ Monitoring

Rangers patrolled by foot and vehicle all County-owned and managed BCP properties, coordinated with LCRA BCP land management staff to discuss common issues, assisted field biologists with ongoing biological monitoring including maintenance of cowbird traps, cowbird population control and feral hog trapping. Rangers monitored flood damage from July rains on Grandview Hills, Lake Perspectives and Vista Point BCP tracts. A filing system was created for reference and to preserve records of documented incidents. In FY2002, there were 15 instances that resulted in direct contact between Rangers and trespassers and there were 6 documented instances of vandalism or criminal mischief to preserve facilities. Rangers coordinated and initiated repairs to damaged facilities. Several of the County's BCP tracts are held through Conservation Easement

agreements with the landowner/developer obligating high levels of BCP Ranger patrol and monitoring.

Coordination with Emergency Agencies

Rangers generated maps of the BCP with address information critical for use by emergency response agencies, and distributed this information to local fire departments and Emergency Medical Service providers. Rangers posted address signs at all preserve property entrances for emergency responders and provided tours of Jollyville Unit preserve tracts for responding agencies.