

## **TURKEY CREEK TRAIL MASTER PLAN UPDATE**

**February 9, 2012**

### **Status**

The realigned segment of Turkey Creek Trail was completed in late 2009. The actions to close and restore the abandoned trail as well as several additional social trails that were to be closed and restored for additional mitigation were also completed at that time.

The Trail Master Plan (TMP) proposal from Friends of Turkey Creek (FOTC) also provided commitments for significant monitoring, trail maintenance, and education and outreach with reporting commitments for each of those activities. The first of the reports were due to the BCCP in the fall of 2010.

### **Concerns**

1. During the 2010 golden-cheeked warbler monitoring season City BCP staff began observing significant evidence of social trail development in the vicinity of the new trail segment. Most of this appeared to be shortcuts at switchbacks. It also included opening of social trails that had been closed and restored as mitigation for the TMP proposal. In addition, noticeable quantities of dog waste are routinely observed along the trail. Some is placed in bags and left on the trail for later collection. Some is uncollected.
2. In response to developing concerns BCP staff requested reports from FOTC representatives to review their monitoring results and verify their trail user education efforts. These requests went unanswered for two months. Further requests were later postponed for two months with promises of a response after holidays. Follow-up to that postponement went unanswered again until early February 2012 when Parks and Recreation staff spoke with representatives of FOTC and responded to BCP staff questions.

### **Issues**

1. Off-trail travel is resulting in significant levels of new social trail development and reopening of closed trails, and is posing a threat to mitigation required by the City's federal permit. This reduction in mitigation is potentially causing the City to exceed its authorized take on this site by exceeding the extent of trail and level of use that was present when the permit was authorized.
2. Outreach, monitoring, trail maintenance, and reporting that were required as conditions of the original TMP approval by the Coordinating Committee and USFWS is not occurring. Representatives from FOTC advised staff from City Parks and Recreation Department that their organization will no longer be responsible for actions committed to in the TMP plan and approvals. They are negotiating with Austin Parks Foundation and the Parks and Recreation Department to assume those responsibilities. However, at this point there is no organization accountable for compliance with the commitments in the TMP for this trail. Parks staff offered to work to address trail maintenance, but also explained severe resource limitations.
3. Education and outreach by FOTC has only occurred on a very limited basis. We were advised by Parks staff that initial attempts to staff education stations along the trail with volunteers during the nesting season were met with such extreme hostility by trail users that volunteers avoided further participation. Neither the two new educational kiosks nor additional educational signage committed to in the TMP have been installed. Parks staff advised us that they are seeking funding for a new kiosk at the trailhead but this is still in progress. Again, there is currently no organization accountable for completion of these commitments from the TMP.
4. We understood that there was an Adopt-A-Park Agreement entered into to support this TMP agreement. It is unclear whether that agreement is still in place and if so with whom. It is also unclear whether that agreement provided any fiduciary protection to provide for the eventual functional dissolution of the accountable organization.