

**Travis County Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) Activities Report
February 1 to April 30, 2012**

BCCP Administration and Land Acquisition

1) Public Participation Process:

- **Applications and PC Sales:** From 2/1/12 to 4/30/12, 4 BCCP applications were received and processed. Two Participation Certificates were issued for a total of \$195,250.00. PC funds received were divided with half going to City of Austin and half going to Travis County.

2) Land Acquisition:

- **Additions to the BCP:**
 - **Lime Creek Unit:** ~18 acres in the Cypress Creek Macrosite (closed Mar. to Apr. 2012)
 - **Irelands Cave:** (closed Feb. 2012)
 - **Current acreage total for BCP = 30,409** acres for ES bird species (as of 5/11/12) plus **46 of the 62** BCP caves have some amount of protection.
- **Future Additions to the BCP:** Negotiating ~300 acres of additional BCP land (including bird and cave tracts). Focusing efforts on cave acquisition and cave management agreements.
- **City of Sunset Valley Managing Partner Agreement with the BCCP:** Drafting document that would add 21 acres to the Preserve. When the agreement is completed, we will bring this document to the BCCP Coordinating Committee for approval and to City of Austin, Travis County Commissioners Court, and City of Sunset Valley City Council for final approval.

3) Staffing:

- Rebekah McIntyre was hired as a Mickey Leland Intern to work from March through July.

Preserve Management and Monitoring

1) Biological Monitoring:

- **Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA) and Black-capped Vireo (BCVI)**
 - GCWA surveys began in early March. County staff and City of Austin/Forest Service researchers are surveying seven 100-acre plots on Travis County BCP.
 - County staff and volunteers are conducting less intensive baseline surveys at the Lime Creek Unit, Webb, Franzetti, Collins, Snowden, Colina Vista, Concordia, and Steiner Ranch #5 tracts.
 - County Staff began surveys for BCVI in early April and are currently monitoring six BCVI territories, all of which are on the Jollyville Unit.
- **Karst**
 - Winter season faunal surveys were performed at six BCCP-listed caves and one other TC-BCP Endangered Species (ES) cave.
 - Winter season cricket exit counts were performed at four BCCP-listed caves and one other TC-BCP ES cave.
 - Fifteen Travis County BCP karst features had locations verified, photographed, and tree tagged following standardized methods for improving protection efforts.
- **Jollyville Plateau Salamander (JPS) and Water Quality**
 - JPS surveys were conducted at springs located at the Sam Hamilton East and Bunten tracts and at the springs in SAS Canyon.
 - Staff monitored water quality and flow at springs known to have JPS, including springs located in the Bunten, Concordia, New Life, Ribelin, and Sam Hamilton East tracts, as well as SAS Canyon and SAS Kretschmarr Salamander Cave.

2) Plant and Animal Control:

- **White-tailed Deer** - Thirty-nine deer were harvested from the County BCP during October through February. The meat was donated to Caritas of Austin and used to feed Austin-area families in need.
- **Feral Hogs** - Feral hogs were observed on several County BCP tracts. County staff set up a trap at the Canyon Vista tract and are baiting and monitoring it.
- **Brown-headed Cowbirds** - Natural Resources and Parks staff started operating six cowbird traps on or near the BCP in March.
- **Ants**
 - Spring season red-imported fire ant (RIFA) surveys and control was performed at all 13 TC-BCP ES caves.

- A BCP Land Managers meeting was held on April 19th to discuss Raspberry crazy ants - a non-native species that has recently been discovered in Travis and Williamson counties. At the meeting, BCP Partners heard presentations about crazy ants and also decided that a BCP crazy ant task group was needed to develop a plan to address how the BCP can best be protected from this invasive species.
- **Invasive Plants** - Staff and volunteers conducted invasive plant removal projects on the Concordia, Woody Hollow, Ribelin, Bunten, and Hamilton Pool tracts.

3) Land Stewardship:

- **Fencing:** A 900 foot section of boundary fence was completed on the Cuevas East tract.
- **Road Repairs:** A 2,000 foot section of gravel service road on the Volente tract was graded and repaired.
- **Utility Line Activity:** In February, Austin Energy (AE) trimmed under their transmission lines on the Ribelin and Sam Hamilton East tracts. AE worked with County staff to do some precise mechanical and hand clearing along their transmission lines to enhance the area for black-capped vireos, as well as meet AE's requirements to remove vegetation growing too close to the lines.
- **BCVI Habitat Enhancement:** In February, County staff contracted some mechanical and hand clearing brush management work on the Ribelin and New Life tracts to enhance these areas for BCVI. About 19 acres were manipulated for the benefit of BCVI. Slash was mulched and left on site.
- **Wildfire Preparedness**
 - A Hazardous Fuel Mitigation Grant was submitted to FEMA in March. This grant focused on 25 linear miles of hazardous fuel reduction (shaded fuel breaks) in the Wildland Urban Interface on the Preserve behind homes and along roadways. It's not clear when the grant decision will be made and when funds would be available but we are hoping to hear by Sept. if we are awarded this grant. If not, it is possible that we will start this work using County funds.
 - Travis County coordinated with City of West Lake Hills on a Hazardous Fuel Mitigation Grant they submitted to FEMA in which some of the work (shaded fuel breaks) would be done on the County's Wild Basin Preserve.
 - Staff participated in Best Management Practices working group meetings for "Hazard Fuel Treatment in Juniper and Oak-Juniper Woodlands". This group of wildland fire experts is developing hazard fuel treatments which could be used within GCWA habitat if approved by USFWS.
 - Staff attended Joint Wildfire Task Force meetings. This Task Force is an interagency group of fire and emergency management professionals who are planning Wildland Urban Interface protections for the community. They are working on a county-wide Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).
 - Staff met with Pedernales Electric Cooperative representatives to discuss removal of power-line transformers from vacant properties on BCP tracts.
 - Staff began an initial analysis of BCP locations along powerlines and roadways to search for possible blocks of standing dead trees. If found, we will be working on a removal plan.
 - Coordinated with adjoining homeowners associations on Ready-Set-Go brochures and other wildfire issues. Provided Ready-Set-Go information on County website.

Outreach Program

- 1) **Volunteers:** 113 volunteers provided 488 hours of service on the BCP assisting with wildlife monitoring, invasive plant control, water quality monitoring, trail maintenance, and clean-up projects.
- 2) **Education/Outreach Programs:**
 - County staff led 59 participants on four guided hikes on the BCP.
 - Staff presented six education programs to 112 students at Texas State University, Concordia University, and Prairie Lea Elementary.
 - Staff scheduled and assisted with two snake safety programs which reached 95 Travis County employees.
- 3) **Scientific Research, Education, and Photography Permits:**
 - Two scientific research permits that had expired at the end of 2011 were re-issued for 2012; one is with the City of Austin to band and monitor GCWA, and one is with Kilgore University to study arachnids. A new scientific research permit was issued with the University of Texas to survey native pollinators. One photographic permit was also re-issued.

Law Enforcement

- 1) **Incidents:** Nine law enforcement incidents were reported and investigated on Travis County BCP properties including 2 cases of criminal trespass, 5 cases of criminal mischief, 1 case of loose livestock, and 1 report of shots fired.