

City of Austin BCP Report
BCCP Coordinating Committee Meeting
August 1-October 15, 2014

Program Administration

BCCP Infrastructure Training Workshop

- Scheduled for October 30, 2014 at UT's J. J. Pickle Research Campus.

Public Presentations

- BCP Hike & Lecture Series (ongoing) – monthly events hosted on a rotating basis among BCP partners.

Biological Monitoring

Karst

- Tawny crazy ants (TCAs) were first observed negatively impacting cave fauna in Whirlpool Cave in June 2013, and it is likely that they have invaded McNeil Bat Cave as well. City and Travis County staff are working with the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA)/Whirlpool Cave manager on monitoring impacts to cave fauna. Staff currently conducts cave faunal surveys quarterly and recently has noticed an increase in numbers since the last survey. It appears that the TCA's are in the process of rebounding from last year's flood event. We still anticipate that this new invader will effectively eradicate most of the cave fauna from this cave and any other cave they invade. The section 6 grant proposal (investigate possible methods of treating TCAs within the cave cricket foraging area) was denied due to lack of funding, however, City and Travis County BCP staffs along with Ed LeBrun (UT Fire Ant Lab) plan to resubmit the grant proposal in November (ongoing).
- Travis County and COA BCP staff drafted a BMP document that specifies methods for contractors to minimize the chance of transporting TCA's to non-infested sites.
- Conducting cave faunal surveys and cave cricket exit counts. (ongoing)
- Monitoring cave conditions, removing trash, and treating for red-imported fire ants. (ongoing)
- BCP Staff is continuing to assist Nico Hauwert and the Watershed Protection Department with the Blowing Sink critical environmental feature (CEF) stabilization CIP project. Several major recharge features/caves are unstable, leading to large amounts of sediment washing into the aquifer. The project will stabilize these features, thus improving water quality to Barton Springs. This project is actively proceeding forward. (ongoing)
- In an effort to educate the public about the importance of caves and cave fauna, Nico Hauwert initiated an effort to find local non-BCP caves that would be appropriate for educational purposes. Staff and volunteers are currently excavating several karst features. (ongoing)
- Cave public access: A cave collaboration group of City and County staff and volunteers met regarding guidelines for future public access to local caves including some BCP permit caves. The goal is to try to determine which caves are appropriate for public access, determine the appropriate number allowed per cave, and come up with a permitting system that would determine qualifications needed for leading cave tours. (ongoing)
- Restoration and monitoring efforts have begun at 2 endangered species caves located in the courtyard at McNeil High. Nico Hauwert and McNeil High School science teacher Tina Vick are leading the restoration effort along with help from FWS, City and Travis County BCP staff. Travis County and City BCP staffs are currently conducting cave faunal surveys with the goal of including student participation for long term monitoring and potential research projects that will benefit the listed species. Viv Loftin is currently working on a restoration plan. City staff will provide plants for this project. (ongoing)

- City and Travis County staff continue to meet with TXDOT, CTRMA as well as other local stakeholders regarding the proposed construction of SH45 SW, its impacts on Flintridge cave as well as other karst features in the area. These meetings are focused primarily on ideas on how to minimize damage to these features. City of Austin Watershed Protection Department is in the initial stages of conducting a hydrological study at Flintridge cave to determine the subsurface drainage in an effort to determine what impacts the proposed SH 45 SW will have on the cave. (ongoing)
- COA WPD and AWU staff are working with Public Works regarding the need to secure public parking for Goat Cave karst preserve as well as securing access to the adjacent Blowing Sink karst preserve. Current expansion work on Davis Lane has eliminated parking and access.

Golden-Cheeked Warbler (GCWA)

- USFS Project: Interlocal Agreement with the US Forest Service (Dr. Frank Thompson, Jennifer Reidy) to provide GCWA Population Viability and Habitat Suitability modeling within the BCP.
 - 5-year study, focuses on four primary questions:
 - What is the absolute abundance of the GCWA on the BCP and on individual macrosites?
 - How do demographics (e.g. density, productivity, survival) vary with landscape and habitat factors?
 - How viable are these populations?
 - How do various management scenarios influence population viability?
 - Completed fourth year of data collection and data entry in collaboration with BCP partners (Audubon, LCRA, Travis County, Wild Basin) and volunteers:
 - Color-banded 184 GCWA's (115 males, 19 females, 50 fledglings) on 18 intensive study plots.
 - Monitored 194 GCWA nests.
 - Resighted 99 (46%) GCWAs banded in 2009-2013.
 - Documented high site fidelity, especially older adults, as well as dispersal (6 males) between years.
 - Conducted point counts and habitat monitoring across the BCP.
 - Annual reports due in December.
- Vickery Method: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided funding for the U.S. Forest Service to compare results of less intensive monitoring (spot mapping and productivity surveys without color banding or nest finding) with more intensive data collection. Jennifer Reidy has drafted a report, which will be submitted to USFWS in October 2014.
- Accuracy of Density Estimates from Models Fit to Point Counts: BCP staff and partners have a manuscript comparing model-based GCWA density estimates from three different studies conducted on the BCP (Texas State University, U.S. Forest Service, Texas A&M University) with our intensive territory monitoring data. The comparisons found that the model-derived estimates tend to overestimate GCWA densities, particularly in areas with low GCWA densities. The co-authors are currently reviewing the draft, which should be ready for submission in December.

Black-capped Vireo (BCVI)

- We confirmed 4 BCVI territories on the Forest Ridge tract, and found 3 nests in two of these (2 nests fledged 3 young in early July, 1 failed in early June). No fledglings were observed in the other two territories. All of the birds were unbanded, except for one male banded by Travis County staff in 2009.
- One BCVI territory (male banded this year by Travis County staff) was documented on the Kent Butler tract that successfully produced two broods. Two mature fledglings were observed in mid-June. A second nest was found on July 10 with at least one chick that fledged the following day. This pair's territory incorporated areas beneath transmission lines where staff has been expanding the suitable habitat.

- COA BCP staff and volunteers are continuing to implement demonstration projects at the Vireo Preserve to promote slope stabilization, soil restoration, and regeneration of native plants on degraded areas that are currently not habitat for either the GCWA or BCVI. Since Vireo Preserve supports many of the habitat types observed throughout the BCP, lessons learned from restoration work at this site should be applicable to other areas within the BCP.

Jollyville Plateau Salamander

- COA BCP staff assisted WPD with several JPS surveys.

Bracted Twistflower

- Non-native *Jasminum mesneyi* encroaching on a group of twistflowers at Ullrich were pulled. More needs to be done to eliminate the non-native from the tract.
- Plans for fence to protect Bracted Twistflower at Mount Bonnell: see Fencing Projects, below.

Preserve Management

Dual-Managed Lands

- AWU and PARD are working to close and restore trails within the Emma Long Motocross Park that are within the Connors Creek critical water quality protection zone. Signs were installed along the trailheads. Staff has started drafting a restoration and monitoring plan.
- The proposed Mount Bonnell fencing to protect bracted twistflower habitat and keep people off the bluff has been designed and is being taken by PARD to the Historic Landmark Commission and Parks and Recreation Board for approval.
- Barton Creek homeless camps: See Law Enforcement below.

Infrastructure Management

- BCP staff is working with a number of infrastructure providers on scheduled maintenance activities during the non-nesting season.
- LCRA is upgrading the T-160 line which runs through the Bull Creek macrosite and received construction approval from BCCP. Construction began September 1, 2014, and has been going smoothly so far. LCRA is working closely with BCP and WPD staff to avoid impacts to endangered/threatened species and habitats.
- We are working with the FWS and City salamander experts on best practices for infrastructure projects on the BCP to avoid “take” of Jollyville Plateau Salamanders.

Law Enforcement

- River Place Nature Trail (MUD trail).
 - The trail decommissioning and restoration work has been completed.
 - Some trespass continues on at least a portion of the closed section of trail.
- Homeless camps are an ongoing management challenge in the Barton Creek greenbelt. AWU and PARD staff continues to monitor these sites and remove camps as they are discovered.
- Major vandalism and theft has occurred at the Blowing sink tract, APD arrested 2 suspects.

Invasive Species/Animal Management

- See Tawny Crazy Ants, above.
- BCP staff is continuing efforts to remove non-native plants on COA BCP tracts.
- BCP staff is actively removing feral hogs.
- BCP staff is treating RIFA with boiling water adjacent to BCP caves.
- BCP staff are preparing for White-tailed deer removal this fall.

Oak Wilt

- BCP staff inspected known oak wilt centers on the Barton Creek/Friesenhahn, Emma Long, JJ&T, Cortaña, Hanks, Canyon Creek, Long Canyon, and Reicher Ranch tracts over the summer, monitoring movement of the fungus and success of control trenches.

Fencing Projects

- COA BCP staff investigated recent flood damage; luckily most sites were easily repaired by staff. However, 2 water gaps on Beard Trust and one water gap on Vaught Ranch road were seriously damaged. COA awarded a contract to a private vendor to repair both water gaps, repair is close to completion.

Fire Management

- Wildland Conservation Division (WCD) staff participated in the creation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Travis County. The final draft is complete and will be rolled out to the public later this month.
- WCD staff is working with the Austin Fire Department Wildfire Division to plan additional fuel mitigation projects to be implemented after September 1st. The work will meet the specifications in the City of Austin Fuel Treatments in Juniper and Juniper-Oak Woodlands, Best Management Practices within the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.