

City of Austin BCP Report
BCCP Coordinating Committee Meeting
April 1, 2016 – August 1, 2016

Program Administration

Personnel

- Sherri Kuhl was hired as the Wildlands Conservation Division (WCD) Manager on May 1, 2016, and Kimberlee Harvey was hired as the BCCP Coordinating Committee Secretary on July 10, 2016. The BCP Program Manager position has been posted and closed on July 18, 2016.

Acquisition

- The Watershed Protection Department acquired the Village at Western Oaks karst preserve, which contains Get Down Cave, one of the 62 BCCP caves. To date, 49 of the 62 BCCP caves have some degree of protection. WPD is currently developing a management plan for the site.

Biological Monitoring

Black-capped Vireo (BCVI)

- COA BCP staff began banding BCVIs in 2016.
- A BCVI male was documented for the first time in the area that was manipulated to create BCVI habitat on the Bohls tract (winter 2003-2004 and 2005; prescribed burn in 2007). This male was banded and later re-sighted on the Forest Ridge tract.
- Five male BCVIs settled in the shinnery of the Cortaña tract and adjacent River Place MUD property this year – the largest population on this site since 2006. At least 4 of the males were mated, but only one pair successfully raised young.
- Seven male BCVIs were found on Forest Ridge in 2016, including a male banded by Travis County BCP staff in 2009. BCVIs and GCWAs occupy the same habitat on Forest Ridge.
- A male BCVI banded by Travis County BCP staff in 2014 returned for the third year to establish a territory, as before, in improved habitat beneath electric utility lines on the Kent Butler Ecological Reserve. He and his mate successfully raised two broods. Another pair attempted to nest in another area of improved utility line corridor habitat, but apparently failed.
- BCP staffs continue to photo-document growth of the improved habitat within utility line corridors on the Kent Butler tract.

Karst

- Restoration and monitoring efforts continue to be implemented at two endangered species caves located in the courtyard at McNeil High. McNeil High School science teacher Tina Vick and City and Travis County BCP staff are leading the restoration and monitoring efforts along with guidance from USFWS personnel. Travis County and City BCP staffs are currently conducting cave faunal surveys and Tina Vick and students continue to conduct cave cricket exit counts with the ultimate goal of improving habitat for cave crickets and documenting the progress of this endeavor. Another major goal is to make this courtyard an outdoor education classroom to encourage more student participation for long term monitoring and potential research projects that will benefit the listed species. City BCP staff also held a volunteer clean up removing most of the remaining trash from the caves as well as a student volunteer revegetation effort planting, mulching, and fencing an additional 50 trees and shrubs, many of which provide forage for cave crickets (ongoing).
- Conducted cave faunal surveys and cave cricket exit counts (ongoing).
- WP hydro geologists are conducting phase 2 of the Flintridge subsurface drainage basin delineation study, a critical study to determine potential future impacts if SH45 is constructed.

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?
- Work on the models is in progress.
- The City of Austin is continuing to work with the USFS to collect survival data for juveniles and develop a long-term monitoring plan.
- Data from the 2016 field season is currently being entered and analyzed. Return rates of banded Golden-cheeked Warbler males were low in 2015 (35%) and again in 2016 (37%).
- Engaged more than 40 volunteers again this year in searching for banded GCWAs beyond the area covered by staff biologists. Time volunteered is still being tabulated, but will certainly exceed 500 hours.

Jollyville Plateau Salamander (JPS)

- COA BCP staff met with the Watershed Protection Department to discuss research goals and plans for JPS surveys. (ongoing)

Bracted Twistflower

- Bracted Twistflowers surveys were completed in April and May, with the help of volunteers and partners from the Bracted Twistflower Working Group. Plant numbers were up at all sites when compared to 2015.
- Fencing installed at Mount Bonnell to protect Bracted Twistflower: see Dual-Managed Lands, below. One plant found inside fencing (No plants were seen inside fencing in 2015).

Preserve Management

Karst

- 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 were unstable, leading to large amounts of sediment washing into the aquifer. This project is nearing completion, the current focus is maintaining recently planted vegetation around each restored feature, this vegetation will reduce sediment runoff and enhance habitat for cave crickets; the final phase will include a new perimeter fence to help prevent ongoing trespass issues.
- 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. To date several significant caves have been opened including grassy cove cave, LaCrosse, hideout, and Wade cave, all of which were recently gated and now open to educational guided tours. (ongoing)
- Monitored cave conditions, removing trash, and treating for red-imported fire ants (ongoing).

Dual-Managed Lands

- The Mount Bonnell fence to protect bracted twistflower habitat and keep people off the bluff has been completed.
- Barton Creek homeless camps: see Law Enforcement below.

Law Enforcement

- Homeless camps are an ongoing management challenge in the Barton Creek Greenbelt and Wilderness. City Wildland Conservation and PARD staffs continue to monitor these sites. They work with APD to remove camps as they are found, and then clean up the large amounts of trash left behind.

- A warrant was issued 07/13/16 for John Douglas' arrest after Austin Police determined that he did not have permission to cut down trees on the City BCP Preserve. Mr. Douglas illegally cleared GCWA habitat on the City's Jester Preserve. Staff from Urban Forestry determined the value of the trees to be

Invasive Species/Animal Management

- BCP staffs are working with Animal Services, PARD, and other City Departments to help develop and implement a Wild Neighbors program, which will include education and outreach for Austin citizens living along the wildland-urban interface.
- Tawny Crazy Ants: Staff from the University of Texas at Austin, Travis County, and City BCP continues to work on the Section 6 tawny crazy ant research. Ed LeBrun hired technicians to help City and Travis County staff on the research and monitoring efforts. (ongoing)
- BCP staffs are working with AgriLife Extension on an updated brochure on the Tawny Crazy Ant.
- BCP staff is continuing efforts to remove non-native plants on COA BCP tracts. (ongoing)
- BCP staff is actively removing feral hogs. (ongoing)

Oak Wilt

- BCP staff continued to monitor movement of the fungus in known oak wilt centers and success of control trenches.

Fire Management

- BCP staff, assisted by neighborhood Firewise committees, continues to identify locations where shaded fuel breaks can be implemented to reduce the chance of wildfire spreading from one side of the wildland-urban interface to the other.
- In early April, WCD staff provided input on the revision of the subdivision development code as part of the City's Code Next initiative.
- In mid-April, WCD staff presented information about the BCP and its wildfire management practices at a community wildfire symposium at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (LBJWFC).
- Fifteen members of the WCD staff completed an Annual Wildland Fire Safety Refresher and Work Capacity Test. This training was conducted in-house to standards set by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group.
- In June, WCD staff participated in the "Harnessing Fire" Nature Nights program at the LBJWFC. Prescribed fire information and a hands-on demonstration were provided for children.
- The Austin City Council voted to direct staff evaluation of adoption of the International Wildland Urban Interface Code. WCD staff have attended informational sessions and provided comments to Austin Fire Department staff on the potential impacts this code could have on BCP properties. Participation will continue through the code adoption process.
- The WCD fire program manager was interviewed by a US Forest Service researcher studying the impacts of the Fire Adapted Communities initiative on land management agencies.
- WCD staffs are working with the LBJWFC and other partners on scheduling a media day to demonstrate prescribed burning at the Wildflower Center.

Habitat Restoration

- COA BCP staff and volunteers are continuing to implement restoration projects at the Vireo Preserve and JJ&T tracts 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 and JJ&T support many of the habitat types observed throughout the BCP, lessons learned from restoration work at these sites should be applicable to other areas within the BCP.