



## Recommendation for Action

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**File #:** 21-2359, **Agenda Item #:** 6.

7/29/2021

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### **Posting Language**

Authorize negotiation and execution of an interlocal agreement with the University of Texas at Austin for mutual support and assistance regarding cave management.

### **Lead Department**

Austin Water.

### **Fiscal Note**

This item has no fiscal impact.

### **For More Information:**

Program inquiries can be directed to Kevin Critendon, Austin Water Assistant Director, 512-972-0191 or Sherri Kuhl, Austin Water Environmental Resource Officer, 512-972-1664.

Inquiries should be directed to the City Manager's Agenda Office at 512-974-2991 or [AgendaOffice@austintexas.gov](mailto:AgendaOffice@austintexas.gov).

### **Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:**

July 14, 2021 - Recommended by the Water and Wastewater Commission on an 8-0 vote with Commissioner Williams absent and two vacancies.

### **Additional Backup Information:**

This action authorizes an interlocal agreement to allow the Austin Water (AW) Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) program to conduct cave restoration, cave management, and offer cave expertise to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 LaCrosse Avenue, (a part of the University of Texas system).

AW BCP may utilize cave specialist contractors and other cave specialists working under existing Austin Water agreements to restore filled caves and install cave gates and other structures to protect the cave, its ecosystem, and visitors. This work helps fulfill City obligations under the 1996 Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan and permit issued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to preserve cave ecosystems, to direct traffic away from federally listed permit caves, and yet provide opportunities for public education on caves. The agreement promotes free or reduced-price access for students of Title 1 schools and other low-income groups.

The University's Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center contains caves that would serve as suitable alternatives for educational tours and other visitors if restored, enabling their use as substitute public access caves, for University and City purposes. In addition, the caves on the Wildflower Center property are part of the Barton Springs-Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, and restoring filled caves on the property is expected to promote natural aquifer recharge, enhance water quality, provide ecosystems and nutrient input for cave ecosystems, and provide resources for cave education. This restoration work will also reduce flooding potential.

### **Strategic Outcome(s):**

Health and Environment.