

*Protecting our community's last wild spaces  
for the benefit of wildlife, water, and people*

# WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

▲ Austin Water Oversight Committee | May 25, 2022







# Growing Wildland Urban Interface

- ◆ The area where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with natural vegetation
- ◆ More than 90% of fires are caused from human ignition. The danger of fire spreading from a road or neighborhood into the preserve, or vice versa, increases as Austin urbanizes
- ◆ Forecast for hot, dry summer so we need to be prepared

# Presentation Outline

- Role of Wildland Conservation Division (WCD)
- Planning Overview
- Cooperative Projects
- Tools for Wildfire Preparedness
- AW Facilities and Operations
- Next Steps



Fuels Reduction  
Projects

Ignition  
Prevention

Ecological  
Restoration

Prescribed  
Burning

Cooperative  
Projects

Long Range  
Planning

# Role of Wildland Conservation Division

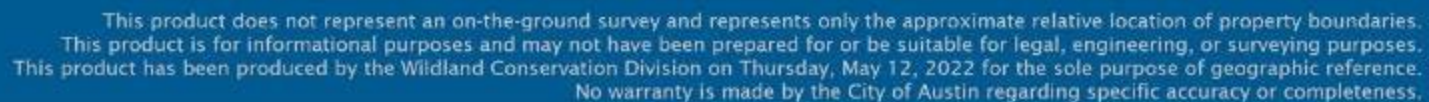
The Wildland Conservation Division's role in a Fire Adapted Community is to manage fire use and fire potential to benefit watersheds, habitat, and public safety.





## Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and Water Quality Protection Lands

 [facebook.com/traviscountybcp](https://facebook.com/traviscountybcp)





# Wildland Conservation Division

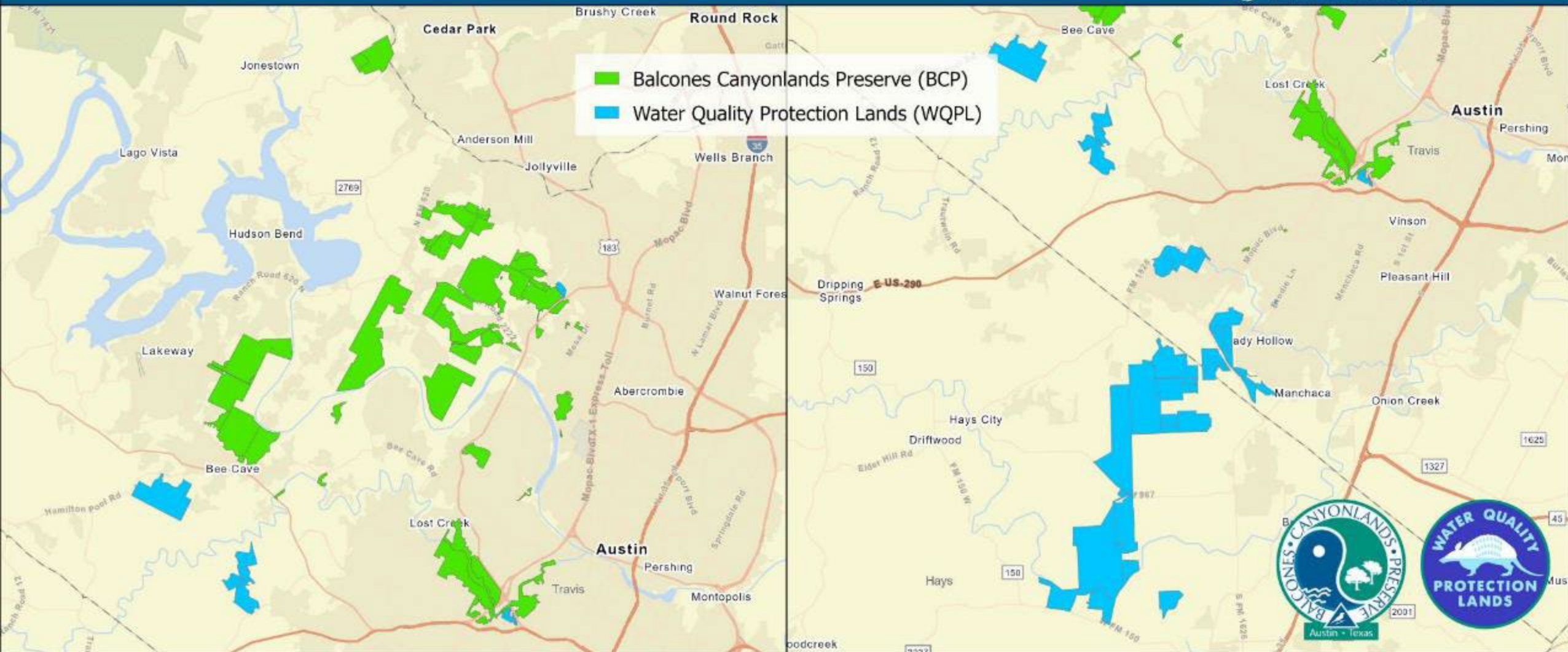
## Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and Water Quality Protection Lands

@austinbcp @wildlandsforwater @bcp\_traviscounty

austintexas.gov/wildlandevents

facebook.com/austinwildlandconservation

facebook.com/traviscountybcp



Projected Coordinate System: NAD 1983 StatePlane Texas Central FIPS 4203 Feet  
at scale 1:196,000. Path S:\ArcPro\_Projects\AW\_WCD\_General\Standard\_Maps\Standard\_Maps.aprx

This product does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.  
This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.  
This product has been produced by the Wildland Conservation Division on Thursday, May 12, 2022 for the sole purpose of geographic reference.  
No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.





# PLANNING OVERVIEW







# Planning Overview

Wildland programs have approved land management plans and adopted Best Management Practices for wildfire mitigation.

- ◆ Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) and permit - 1996
- ◆ 1999 Balcones Canyonlands Preserve land management plan
- ◆ 2001 Water Quality Protection Lands land management plan







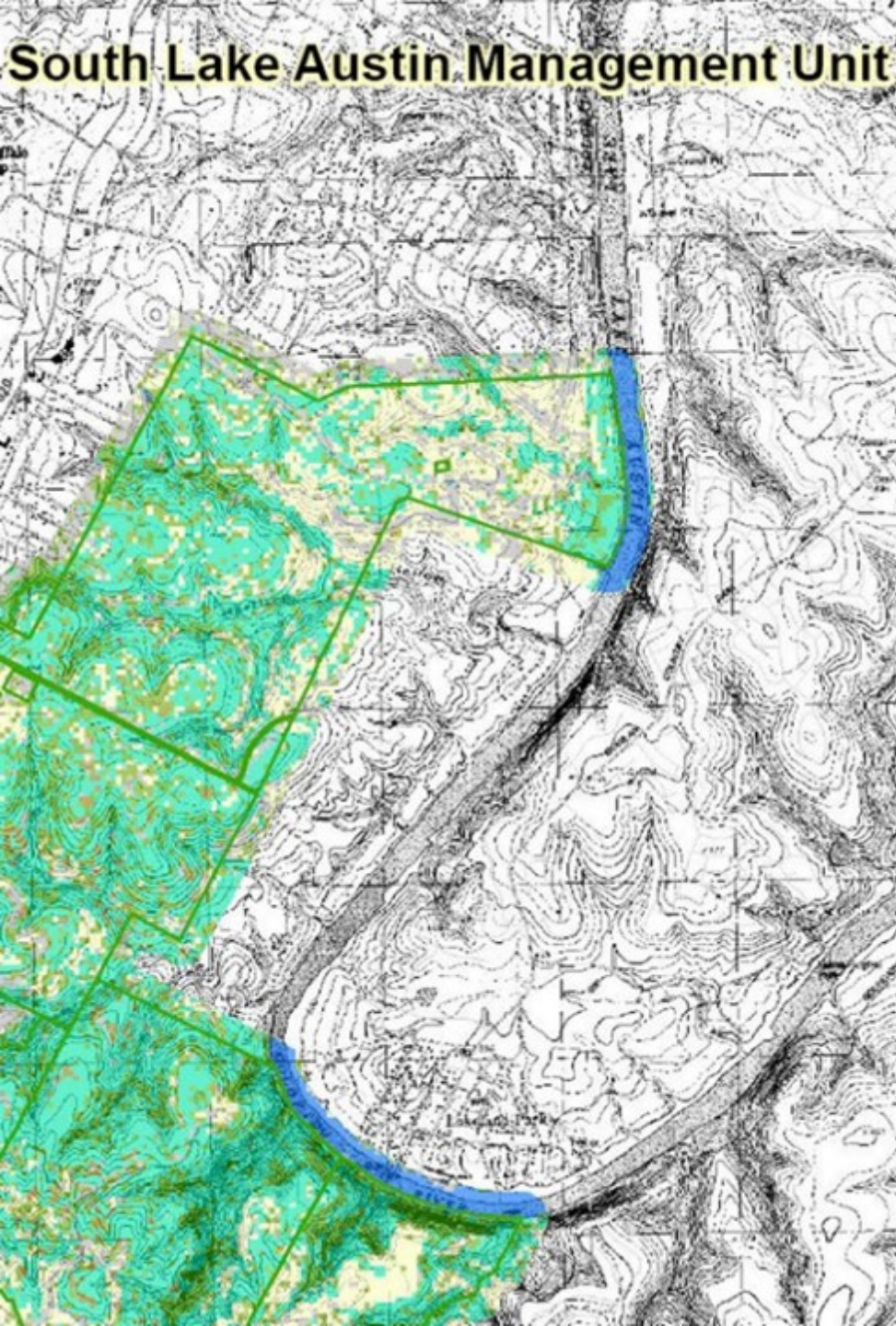
# Wildfire Risk Modeling

## Hazard Determination

- ♦ **2009** - Fuels assessments and fire behavior modeling specific to the BCP produced by Baylor University as a part of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)
- ♦ **2012** - Refined methods for wildfire risk determination developed with AFD







# Strategic Site Plans

- ◆ Across all Austin Water facilities and properties, hazard mapping is underway to inform strategic site plans.
- ◆ Plans include individual and recurring Firewise structure and vegetation treatments.





# Wildfire Prevention Plans

Wildfire Prevention Plans required prior to access for all City of Austin Wildland Conservation Division properties.

Elements of these plans:

- Fire suppression equipment on site
- ID Fire department jurisdiction
- Wildfire spotter designation, including name and phone #
- Emergency contacts

This guarantees two-way protection, for both conservation lands and infrastructure providers





A photograph of four women standing outdoors in a wooded area. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The woman on the far left is wearing a black t-shirt and orange pants. The woman next to her is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The woman in the center is wearing a black t-shirt and a blue baseball cap. The woman on the far right is wearing a black t-shirt, a white baseball cap, and a black glove on her left hand. A semi-transparent blue banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "COOPERATIVE PROJECTS" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

# COOPERATIVE PROJECTS





# Cooperative Projects

- Austin/Travis County Wildfire Coalition
- Live Fuel Moisture Monitoring Program
  - AW has tracked live fuel moistures bi-monthly since 2007
- BCCP Collaborative Infrastructure Projects
- AFD Wildfire Division
  - Support Firewise messaging and outreach efforts to community groups and neighborhoods





A group of firefighters in yellow gear are gathered outdoors for a meeting. They are wearing helmets and holding papers, suggesting a briefing or training session. The background shows a clear sky with some clouds and a dry, grassy field. A blue banner is overlaid on the image, containing the title text.

# TOOLS FOR WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS





# Shaded Fuel Breaks

Carefully planned thinning of dense tree cover and removal of underlying brush. *More fire protection, much less destructive than clear cutting.*

- Typically 60-foot-wide treatment off of property boundary (can vary)
- Typically 4 to 8 foot high trimming
- Shrubby underbrush only (<4 inches in diameter)
- All work occurs on COA side of fence



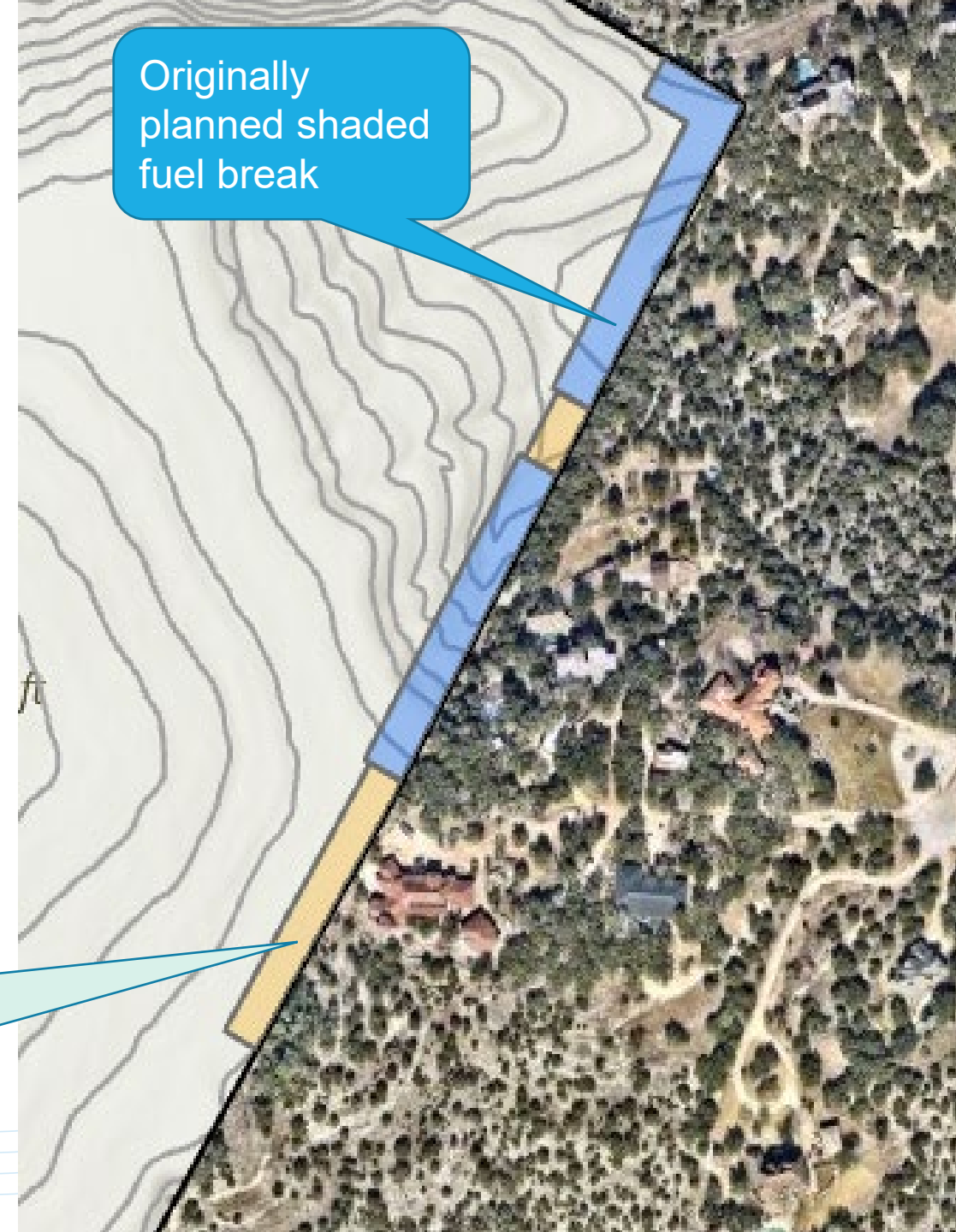
Image credit: City of Richmond





# Planning Shaded Fuel Breaks: Detailed Evaluation

- ◆ Careful prioritization of treatment areas given limited funds and large scale of project
- ◆ Reality on the ground dictates work; anticipate adjustments
- ◆ Adapt to new construction built after original Potential Treatment Zone analysis



Originally planned shaded fuel break

Additional shaded fuel break needed identified by ground truthing



# Shaded Fuel Break

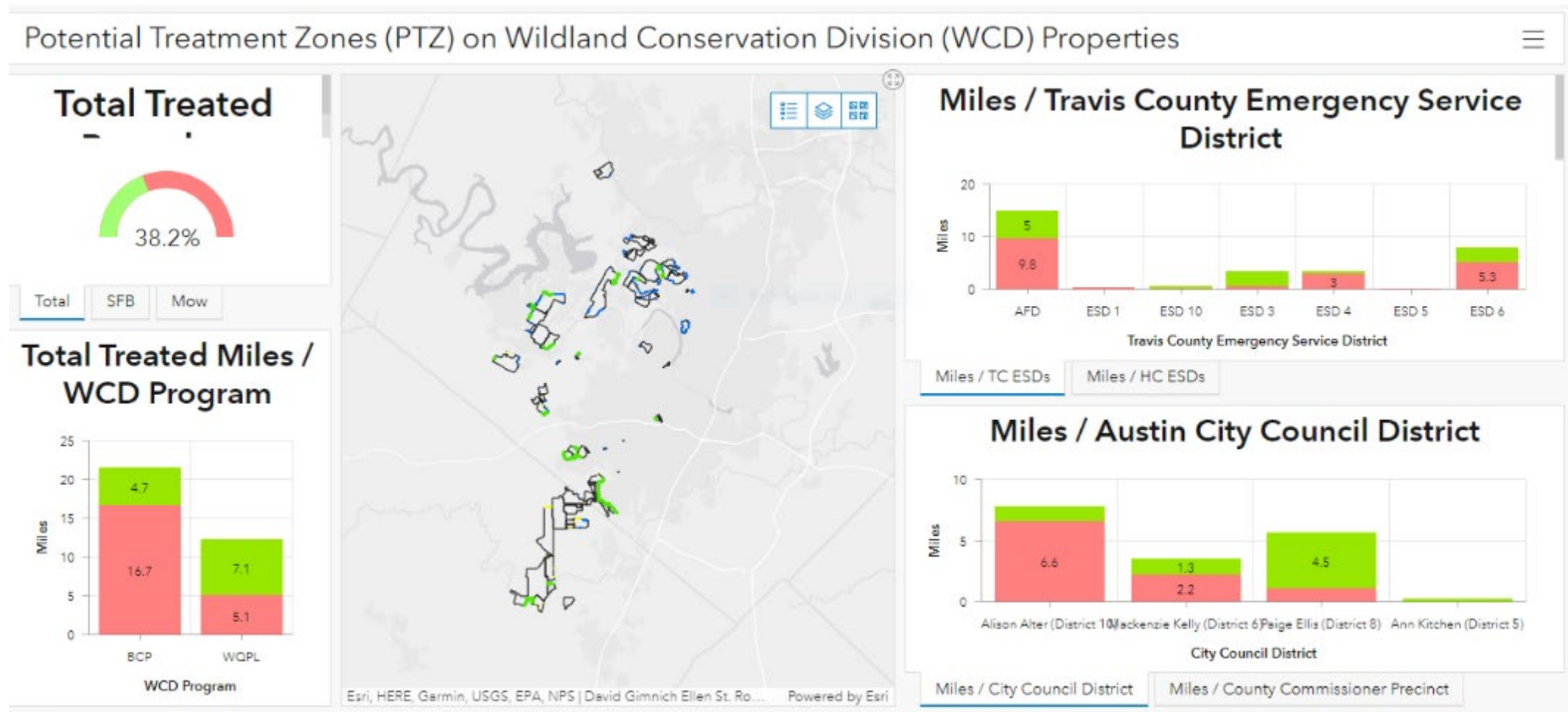
## Challenges

- Difficult topography and limited access makes equipment access and debris removal challenging
- Steep terrain also requires extra care
- Need to minimize erosion/habitat impacts
- Limited workforce





# Planning Shaded Fuel Breaks: *GIS Analysis and Dashboard*





# Staff Training

- ◆ Collaborative wildfire training ongoing with AFD, county emergency service districts, and other local fire agencies.

Incident Command System

Wildland Urban Interface fire response

Wildfire Cause Determination

Courses in prescribed fire operations

- ◆ 2019 - Forestry Specialist position funded and hired
- ◆ 2021- Second Forestry Specialist hired to assist with utility-wide wildfire preparedness work







# Prescribed Burning

- Accomplishes land management goals
- Conducted by staff trained to the highest standards set by national wildfire experts
- To ensure safety, practitioners follow strict protocols and conduct burns within a narrow window of environmental conditions
- Austin Fire Department involvement
  - issues permits for prescribed burns within jurisdiction
  - on site to provide support
- 11,000 acres of Austin's Wildlands treated since 2001







# **AW FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS**

Climate resilience goals require equal parts hard work and thoughtful planning





# AW Facility Assessments



- Facility assessments completed
- 2021: Completed first phase of fuels reduction work at Ullrich Water Treatment Plant





## Next Steps

- ◆ Continue working with partners such as AFD and PARD and newly created Austin Civilian Conservation Corps on Shaded Fuel Breaks and creating fire resilient landscapes
- ◆ Climate change considerations in managing land and building resilient landscapes
- ◆ For more information:  
**[austintexas.gov/wildlands](https://austintexas.gov/wildlands)**

