

**TRAVIS COUNTY'S BCCP Activities FY2023 Biannual Update: 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023**

<b>BCCP Administration</b>	
Public Participation	<p>Thirty-one Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) applications were received and processed, and ten Participation Certificates were issued. A total of \$27,349.00 in mitigation payments were received and split 50:50 between Travis County and the City of Austin.</p>
Personnel	<p>In May, Natural Resources Tech, Sam Berg, was promoted to a Natural Resources Supervisor position.</p> <p>Jaya Torres was hired as a Natural Resources Tech-Interpretive Guide in May.</p> <p>Kennedy Diamond worked as a Mickey Leland intern from June through August.</p> <p>In June, Natural Resources Tech, Nancy Sandoval, was promoted to a Natural Resources Specialist position.</p> <p>Seasonal Natural Resources Techs, Jake Olson and Alexandra Ciongoli, completed their term in August and Jennifer Reidy completed her term in September.</p>
<b>Rare and Endangered Resources Management</b>	
Golden-cheeked warblers and Black-capped vireos	<p>Natural Resources staff (Staff) conducted golden-cheeked warbler intensive plot, enumeration, and presence/absence surveys during March through June and black-capped vireo surveys were conducted from April through August.</p> <p>Travis County and City of Austin staff color banded 17 golden-cheeked warblers and 33 black-capped vireos on Travis County BCP and Parks properties. Color banding aids in identification of individuals while surveying (see Photos 1 and 2).</p>
Karst Invertebrates	<p>Staff performed spring season faunal surveys at seven BCCP-listed caves. Summer season surveys were conducted at nine BCCP-listed caves and one potential substitution cave.</p> <p>Spring season cave cricket exit counts were performed at six BCCP-listed caves. Summer season exit counts were conducted at six BCCP-listed caves and one additional endangered species cave.</p> <p>Travis County and City of Austin staff participated in a BCCP Karst Completion meeting in August.</p> <p>Travis County and City of Austin staff set traps in the pools within Stark's North Mine to see if collections could be made for salamanders and aquatic invertebrates. Water samples were also taken and a drip monitor was installed.</p> <p>Contractor, Zara Environmental, started additional analyses of karst features on the Kotrla Unit and submitted specimens collected on the property for taxonomic identification. Two of the specimens appear to each be separate, new pseudoscorpion species.</p>

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Salamanders	A Travis County research permit was issued to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service researcher, Peter Diaz, to access Travis County BCP and Parks properties to collect salamander DNA samples.
<b>Plant and Animal Management</b>	
Bird Banding	Staff established a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding station on the New Life tract and completed a pilot season of banding in August. MAPS is a a continent-wide collaborative effort among public agencies, non-governmental groups, and individuals to assist the conservation of birds and their habitats through bird banding. Staff captured, banded, and collected data on 110 individual birds including 16 different species (see Photos 3 and 4).
Brown-headed cowbirds	Natural Resources staff, Parks staff, and volunteers operated five cowbird traps on or near the BCP from April through June.
White-tailed deer	Staff completed camera deer surveys in September. Deer spotlight surveys began in September and will continue through October.
Feral Hogs	Staff trapped and harvested 43 feral hogs: two from the Kotrla Unit and 41 from the Flying K conservation easement adjacent to the Kotrla Unit.
Invasive Ants	<p>Red imported fire ant surveys and treatments were conducted at nine BCCP-listed caves and two additional endangered species caves.</p> <p>Staff completed the final round of a five-year study to collect canopy arthropods on the Collin's tract during the golden-cheeked warblers' breeding season. This study looked at how tawny crazy ants may impact the warbler's food supply.</p> <p>Staff conducted in-cave sampling of tawny crazy ants at Weldon and No Rent Caves. Dr. Ed LeBrun's lab continued to evaluate the establishment and spread of the microsporidian pathogen within the population.</p>
Invasive Plants	Staff removed more than 3,380 non-native invasive plants from 17 tracts. Additionally, wisteria vine was treated on approximately 0.5 acre of the Bunten tract.
Oak Wilt	Several new oak wilt sites were discovered on the BCP in September and staff are researching mitigation options. Staff are continuing to analyze aerial imagery and field verify other suspicious oak die-off areas for evidence of oak wilt.

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<b>Land Stewardship</b>	
Habitat Restoration	<p>Staff planted about 50 native trees and seedlings at the Medway restoration site in April. Staff and volunteers completed several workdays over the summer, constructing brush berms and rock check dams to further prevent erosion and run-off. A contractor spread compost and native mulch over the Medway berm/swale restoration area in July, completing construction of the pilot Conservation Terrace project.</p> <p>Staff collected, processed and stored native plant seeds. Staff have also started a pilot native plant propagation project and are currently growing 300+ native tree and shrub seedlings to use in future biodiversity and restoration projects.</p>
Fence and Road Construction and Repairs	<p>A contractor completed construction of 9,150 feet of new fence on the west side of the Flying K tract.</p> <p>Numerous fence repairs were made by staff and contractors to fix damage caused by fallen trees and limbs or from vehicle collisions.</p> <p>Construction was completed on a culvert replacement project on the New Life tract (see Photos 5 and 6).</p>
Buildings	<p>Jackson and McElhaney Architects moved from the design phase of the future Travis County BCP Visitor Center to the development of construction plans and permitting.</p>
Conservation Easements	<p>Two annual reviews were conducted on BCP conservation easements. One landowner was non-compliant with their easement but the issue was resolved.</p>
Wildfire Mitigation	<p>During the summer, staff conducted storm damage assessments and initial site prep in shaded fuel break treatment areas within the wildland-urban interface. Staff and Lake Travis Fire and Rescue resumed storm damage clean-up and shaded fuel break maintenance in September.</p> <p>Travis County applied to the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds to conduct fuel reduction projects on the BCP and County Parks.</p>
Utility Infrastructure Corridors	<p>The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) worked on a winter storm hardening construction project on their Marshall Ford to Spicewood to McNeil transmission lines which run through the BCP.</p> <p>Austin Energy and the Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) conducted routine inspections and vegetation clearing along their transmission lines which cross through the BCP.</p>
Water Quality	<p>Staff monitored water quality at three sites on or near the BCP using Environmental Integrity Index methodology.</p> <p>A water leak was discovered on the Canyon Vista tract in May. Staff notified Austin Water and they sent a crew to repair the leaking pipe.</p>

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<b>Patrol and Law Enforcement</b>	
Trespass and Property Damage	<p>There were two incidents of fence damage due to vehicle collisions on the Lime Creek Ranch and Trails End tracts.</p> <p>Trespassing, dumping, and tree cutting along the BCP boundary are ongoing issues. Staff worked with neighbors to resolve issues and, when necessary, pursue restitution for damages.</p>
Law Enforcement Training	<p>The Travis County Sheriff's Office, the Austin Police Department, and Williamson County SWAT used the vacant BCP Building and surrounding grounds to conduct a series of trainings.</p>
<b>Outreach/Volunteers</b>	
<i>See BCP Partner Education Summary FY23 Biannual Report for April 1 – September 30, 2023</i>	



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Photos 1-4: Staff banded birds during the spring and summer to aid in the identification of individual golden-cheeked warblers and black-capped vireos during surveys, and to monitor productivity of resident birds at a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station.



Photo 1. Juvenile golden-cheeked warbler.



Photo 2. Female black-capped vireo.



Photo 3. Male painted bunting.



Photo 4. Jeremy Hull removing a Carolina wren from a mist net.



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Photos 5-6: Construction was completed on a culvert replacement project on the New Life tract. Photo 5 shows the new culvert from the south side of the road and Photo 6 shows it from the north side of the road.



Photo 5.



Photo 6.