

Update on the Austin Water Environmental Resource Office and Wildland Conservation Division

Water and Wastewater Commission | November 10, 2026

Environmental Resource Office Programs

- Climate Resilience and Mitigation
- Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend
- Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP)
- Wildland Conservation Division
  - Water Quality Protection Lands (WQPL)
  - Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP)



Understanding & Preparing AW for Climate Change

Water Utility Climate Alliance (WUCA)



WUCA Mission

Collaboratively advancing water utility climate change adaptation

WUCA Vision

Climate-resilient water utilities supporting thriving communities

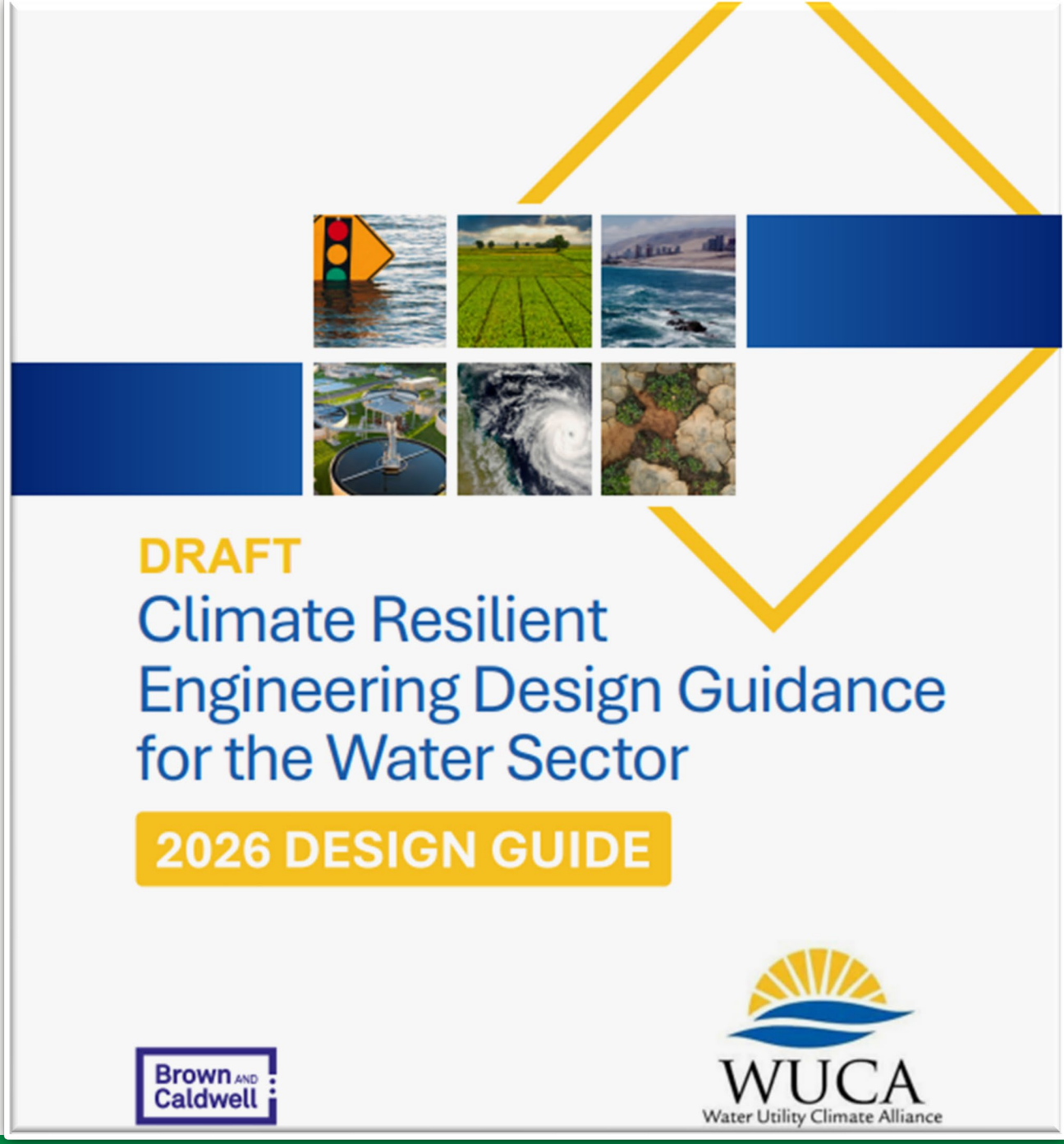
Climate Resilient Engineering Design Guidance Project

Phase 1: Develop Design Guidance Strategies

(Jan 2025 – June 2026)

Objective:

Develop practical, tangible, climate-resilient design guidance strategies for a range of utility engineering, infrastructure & capital project types

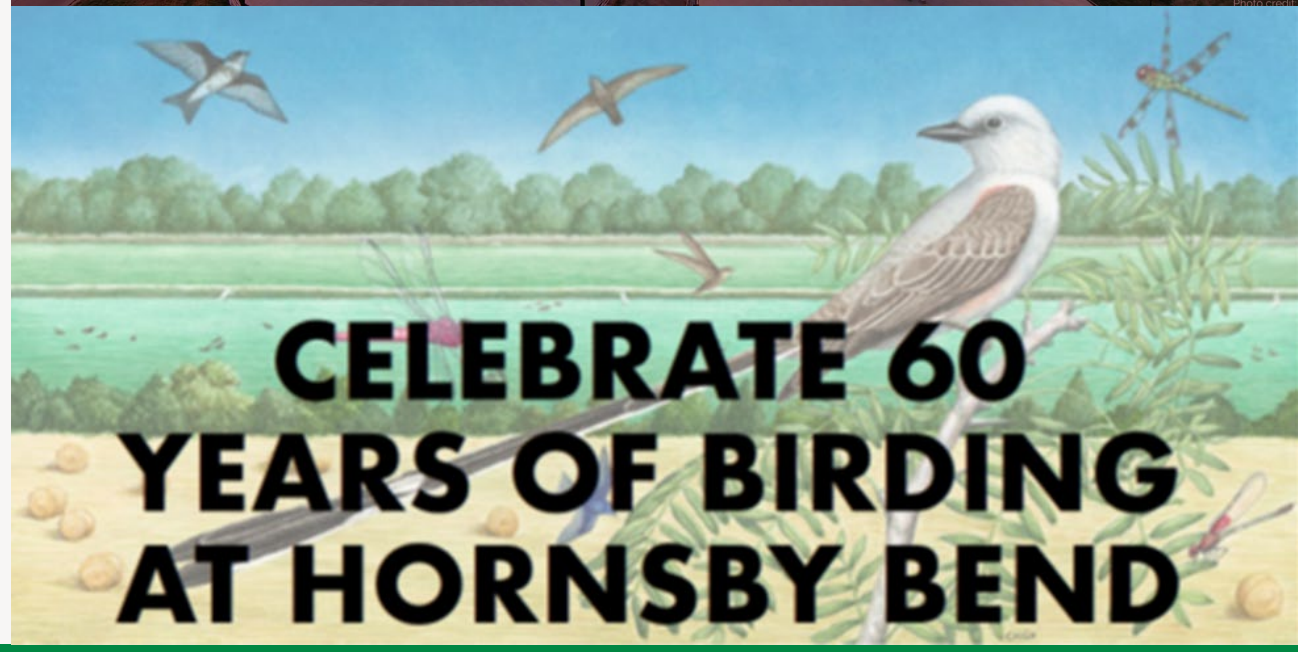


Conducting Environmental Research and Supporting Citizen Science

Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Plant

- Award winning biosolids recycling facility
- Co-gen system utilizing digester biogas
- Effluent reused to water onsite hayfields rather than discharged back to river
- DilloDirt™ compost - a partnership for recycling all biosolids and Austin Resource Recovery yard trimmings
- One of the best birding sites in Texas





Hornsby Bend Map

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC 6 A.M. TO 9 P.M. EVERY DAY

The City of Austin's home for our Biosolids Management Plant, the Center for Environmental Research (CER), community partners, and more. All visitors must show valid I.D. at main entrance.







Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend

A partnership for urban ecology, community, education, and research between Austin Water, The University of Texas, and Texas A&M University – since 1998

- **Research**:
  - Urban waste recycling, avian ecology, hydrogeology, riparian ecology, river management
- **Free monthly events**:
  - River monitoring trip, bird survey, birding field trip, ecological literacy day
  - Free lunchtime lecture series– three times each month

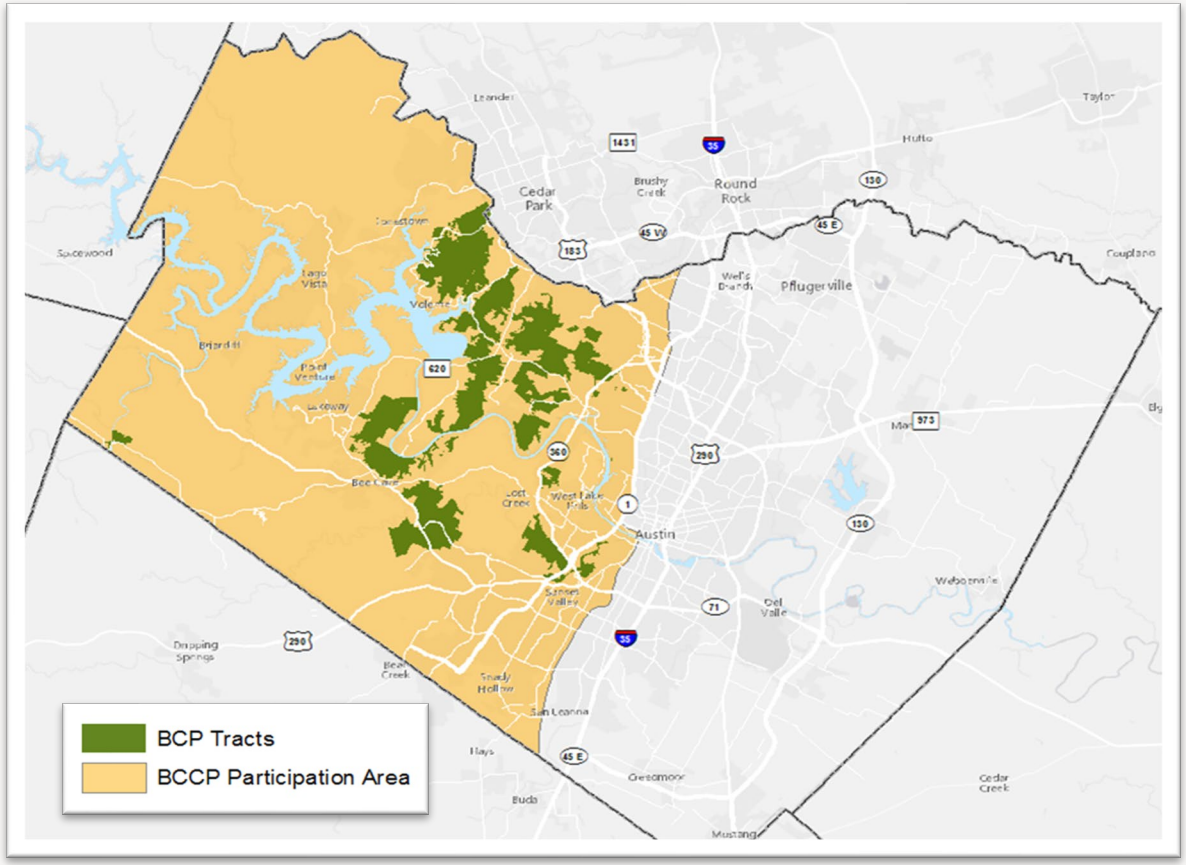


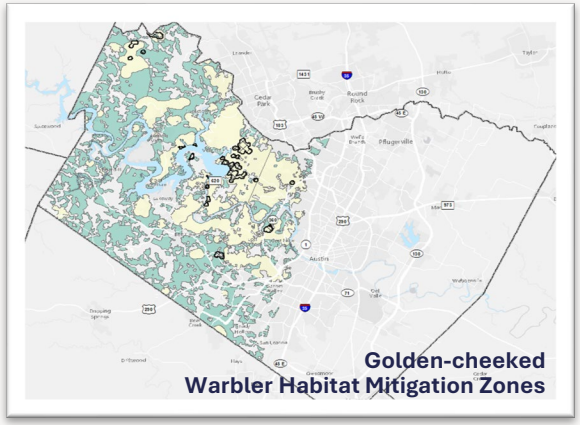
Endangered Species Act Compliance

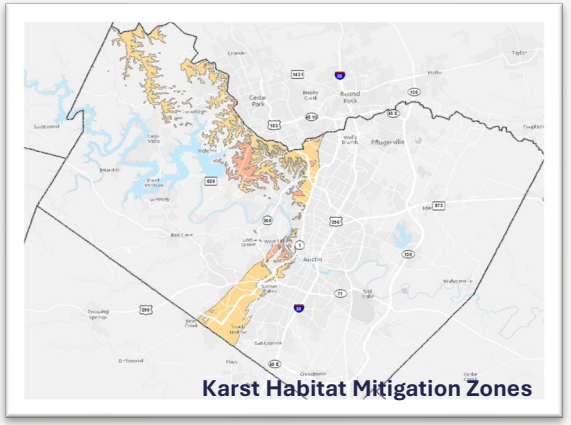
Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP)

What is the BCCP?

- A regional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) jointly implemented by Austin and Travis County since 1996
- Primary Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance mechanism for City operations through Federal Incidental Take Permit
  - Under the ESA, the definition of “take” is to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct.

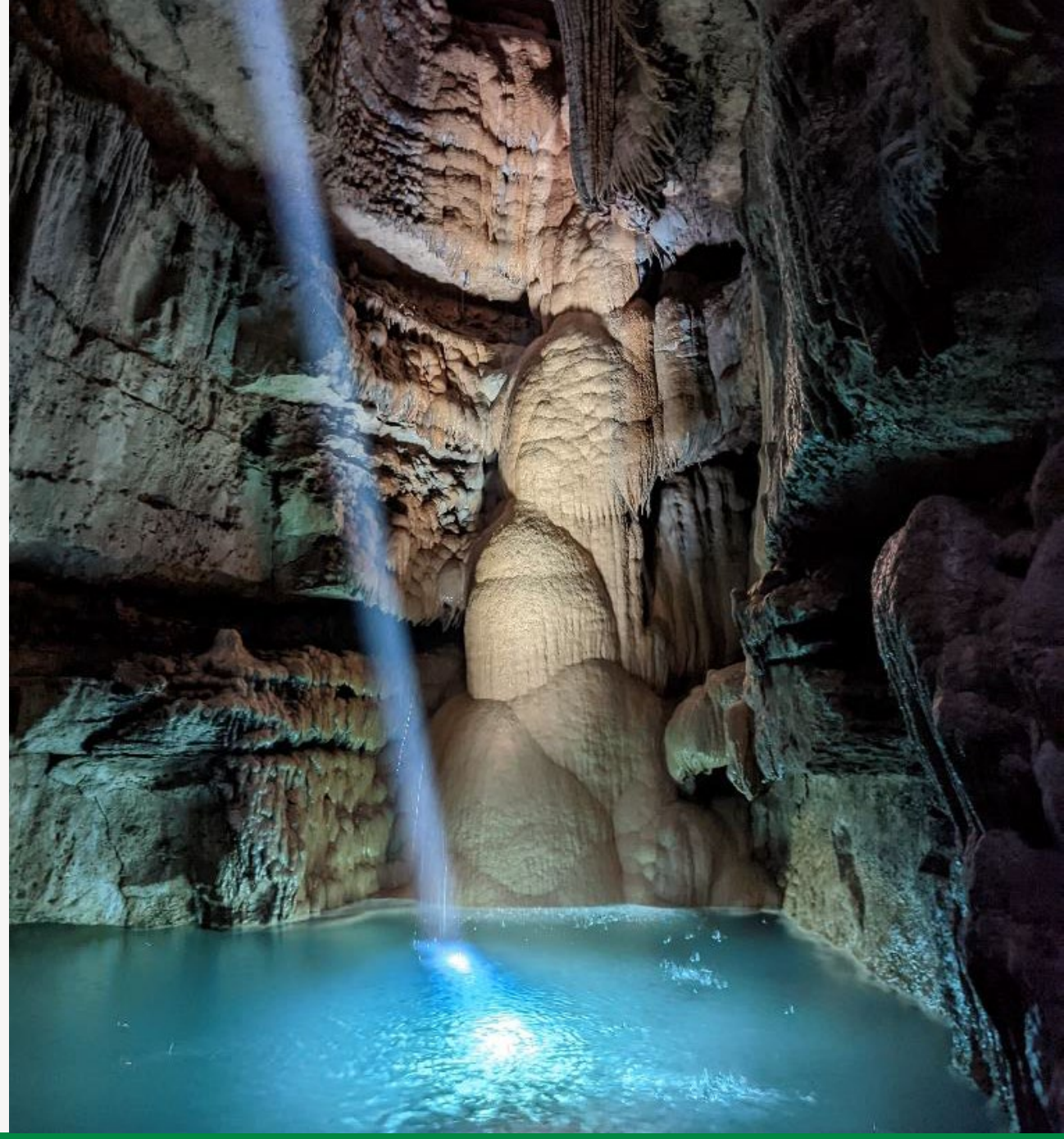






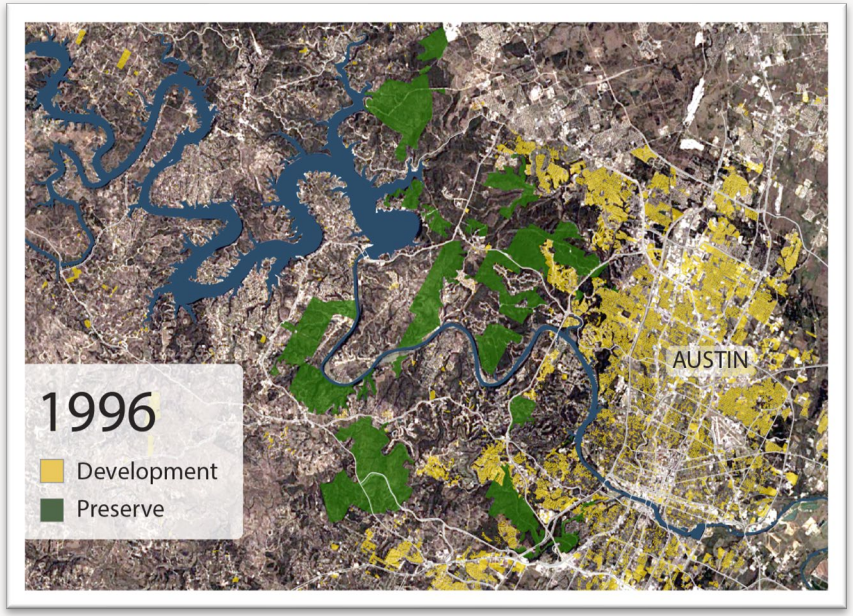
What Does the BCCP Do?

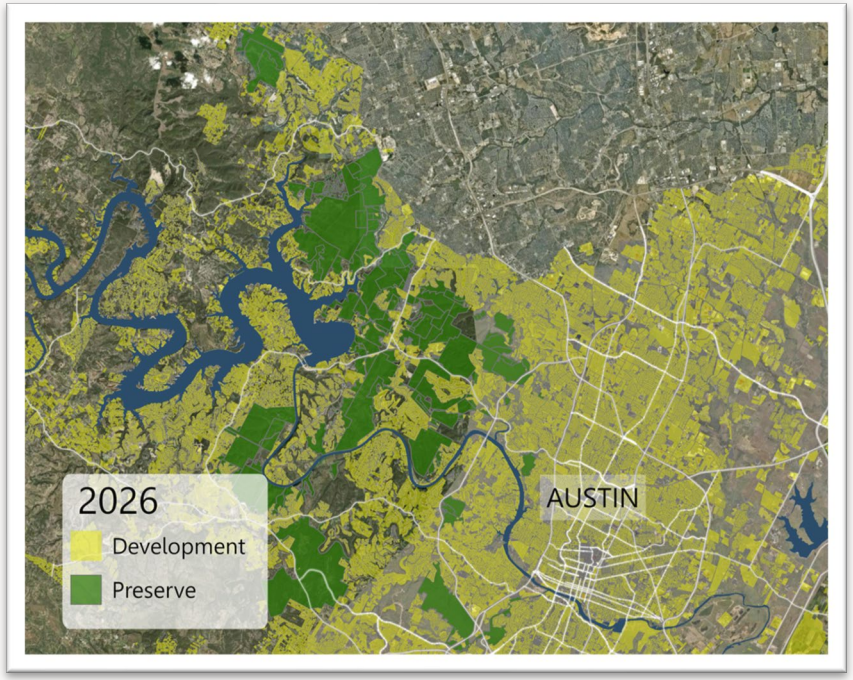
- Provides incidental take authorization for activities affecting listed species
- Balances regional development with long-term protection of endangered species and habitats
- Conservation commitments delivered through the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP)



BCCP Benefits

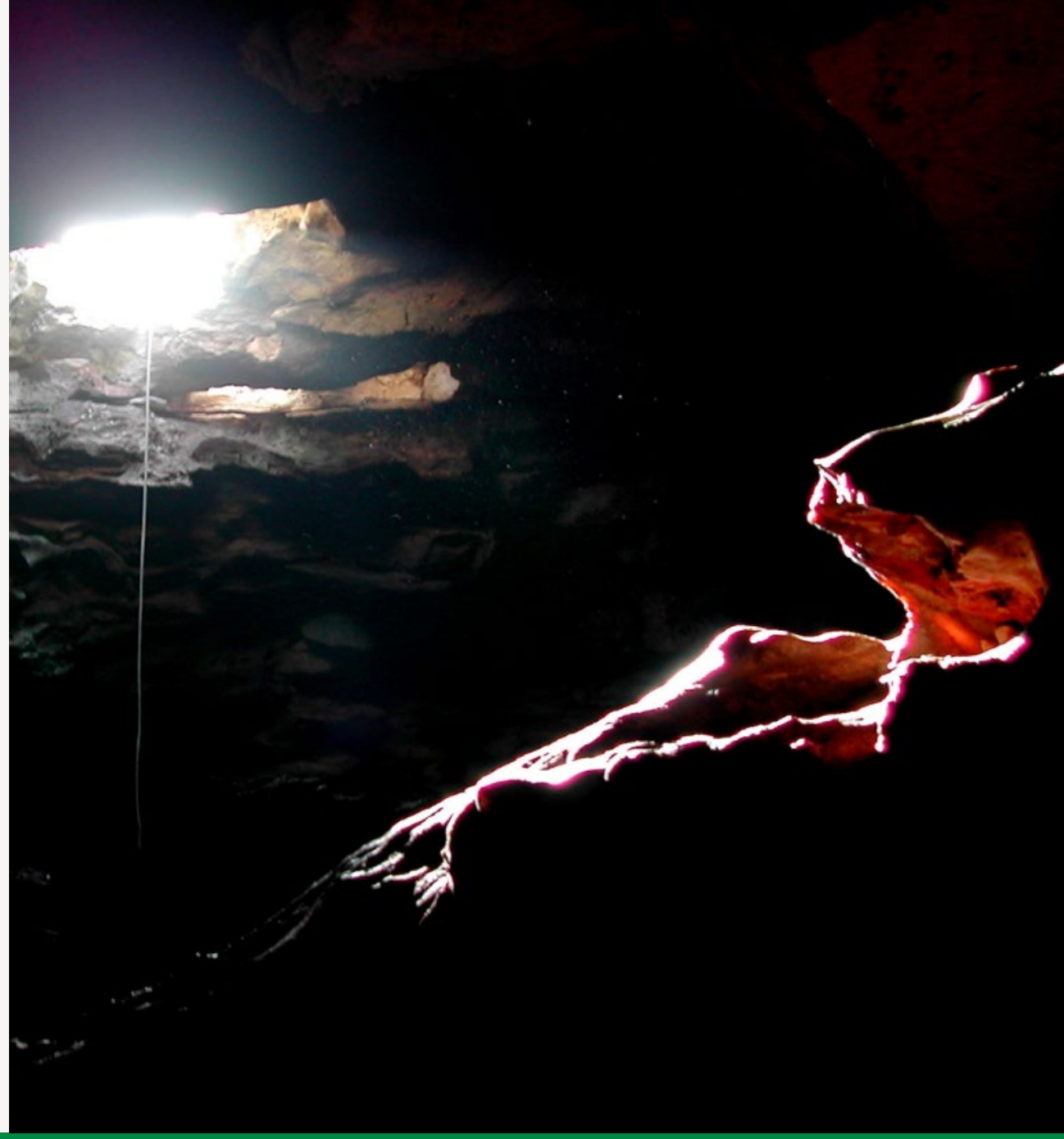
- Streamlined project delivery with reduced regulatory delays
- Over 1,500 development projects and 400+ infrastructure projects permitted
- Supported 12,000+ acres of development
- Maintains local control over ESA compliance
- Permanent wildland conservation supporting water quality, biodiversity, and resilience





BCCP Permit Renewal

- Permit expired May 2026
- City and County executed Interlocal Agreement for permit renewal consulting support
- Proposed amendments will be brought to BCCP Coordinating Committee and elected bodies for full review and public input
- Permit renewal/update will need to meet current USFWS regulations and consider new species



Permit Renewal Advisory Committee Formation

- Near-term action: establish required advisory committees:
  - Biological Advisory Team (BAT) - scientific expertise
  - Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) - stakeholder representation
- Required by Texas Parks & Wildlife Code Chapter 83
- Solicitation to open early in 2027
- Committees will guide technical and public components of renewal



BCCP Permit Renewal

- The BCCP has supported Austin's development, infrastructure, and conservation goals for 30+ years
- Streamlined ESA compliance under one coordinated framework
- Modernize the conservation strategy using best available science
- Strengthen partnerships, public engagement and local control





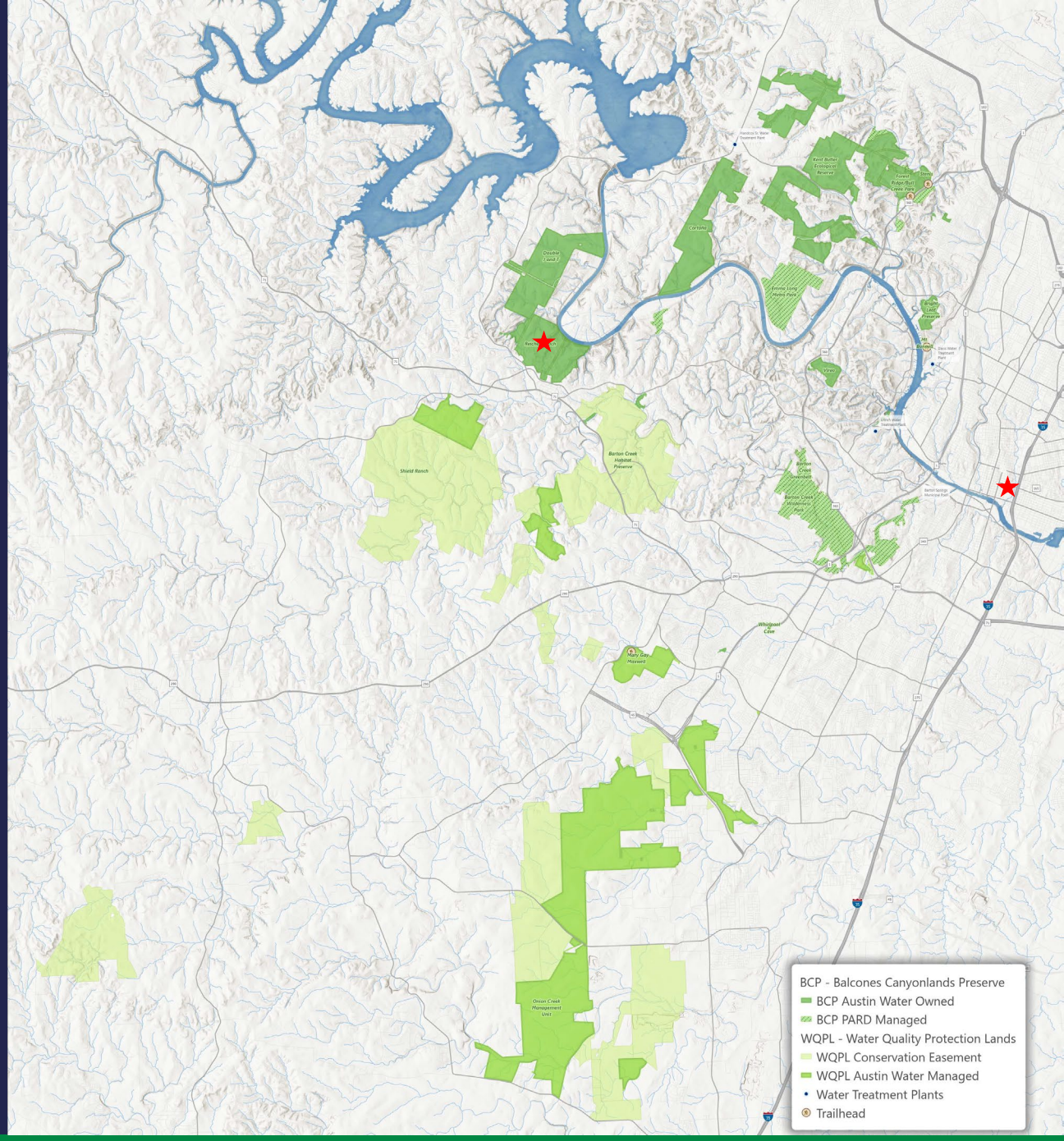
Wildland Conservation


Austin Water works every day
to provide water for people and
care for the environment.

Austin

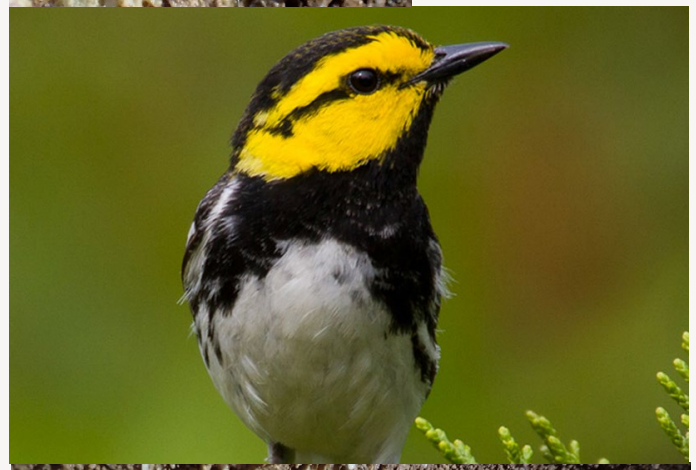
Wildlands Today

- **49,000+ protected acres**
  - 23,000 acres managed directly
  - 3,000 acres of dual-purpose parkland
  - 23,000 acres of conservation easements
- **$280M+ investment** in land acquisition over 30+ years
- **Conservation at scale.** 150+ miles of boundary, 30 miles north-to-south
- **City-wide, voter-approved commitments + AW stewardship**



Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

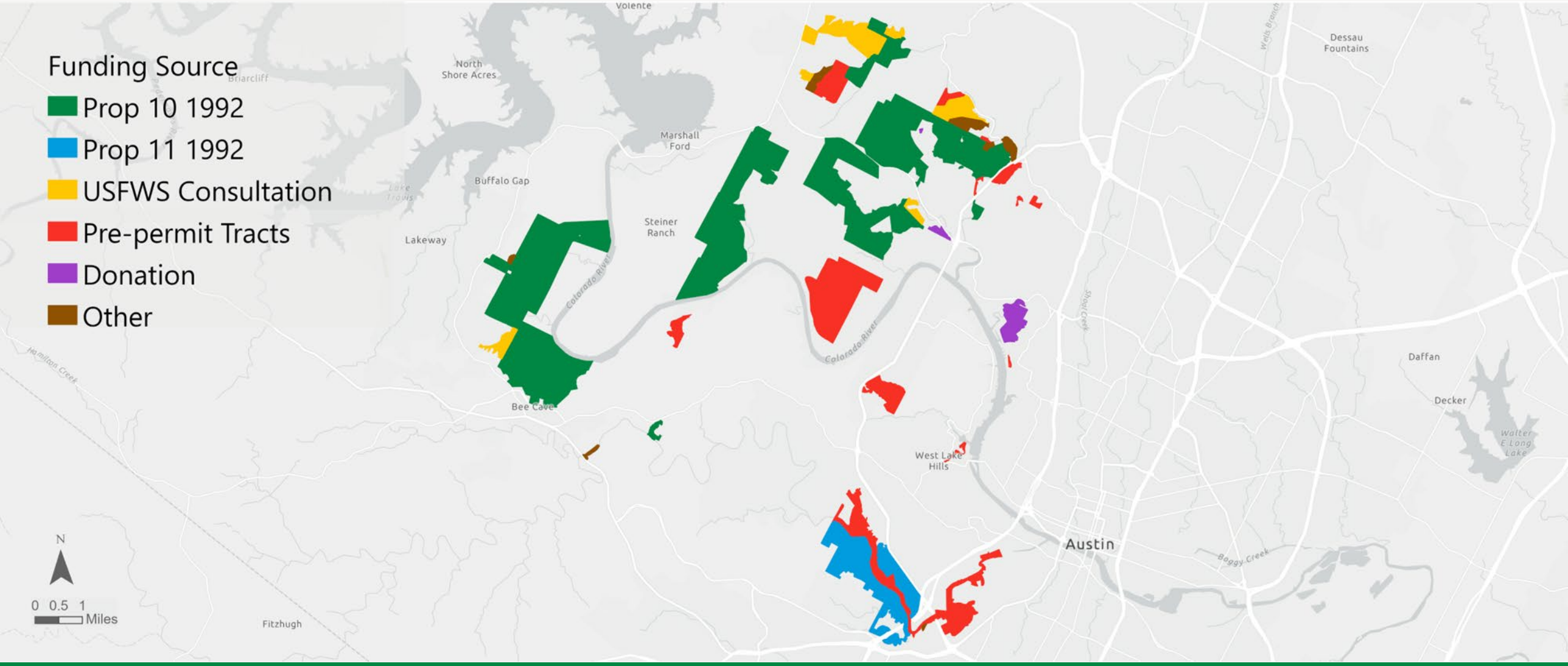






- Established by the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan
- 13,000+ acres of City-owned land
- Protects woodland and cave habitat for endangered species and species of concern
- Public areas of the Preserve include some of Austin's most cherished places – Barton Creek, Mt. Bonnell, Bull Creek
- Helps to protect quality of our water supply in Lake Travis & Lake Austin watersheds

Balcones Canyonlands Preserve



Water Quality Protection Lands

- Established in 1998 to protect the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer
- Protects and restores native grassland savannas and creeks that provide the main source of water for Barton Springs
- Austin Water actively manages land over 28% of the Barton Springs recharge zone to protect groundwater
- Prescribed burn program carefully mimics natural fire cycle using highly trained wildland fire professionals





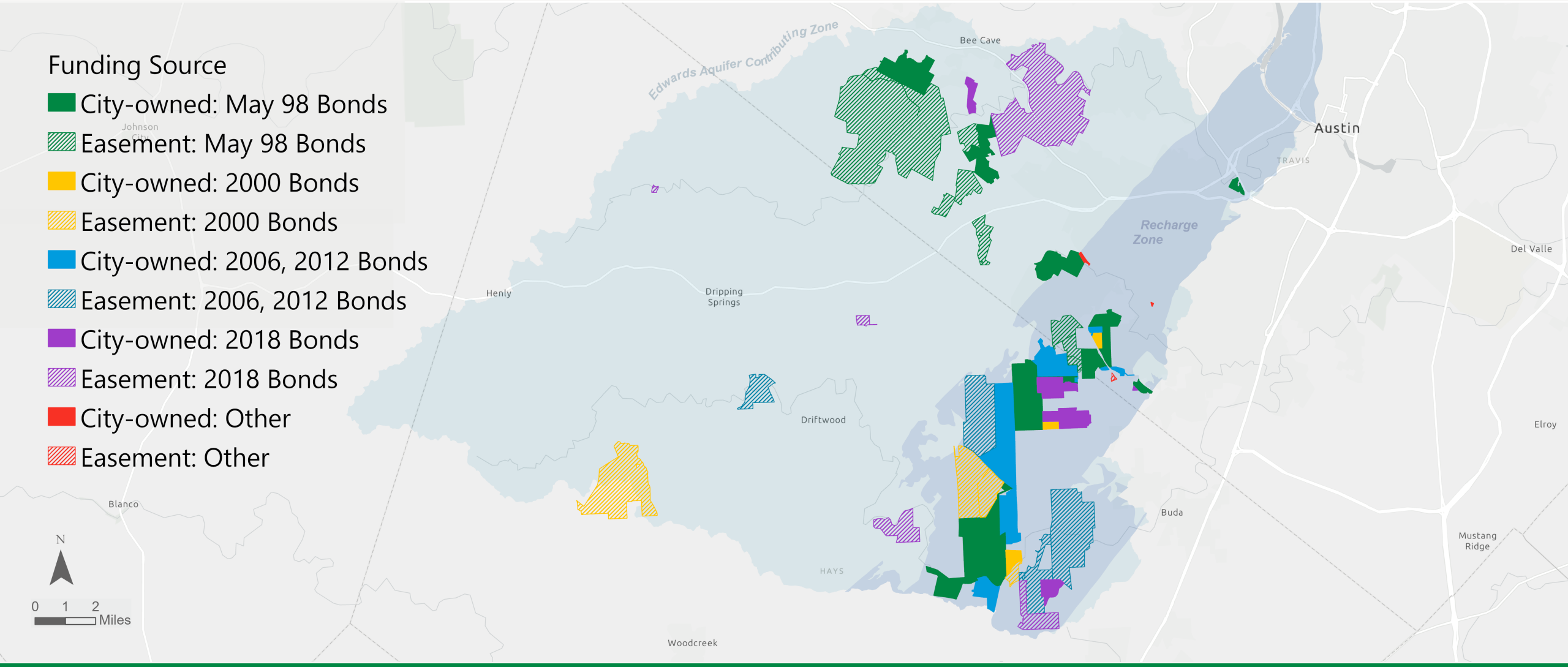
Image credit: Grace Borangasser





Image credit: Linda Chayra

Water Quality Protection Lands





Benefits

Economic and Community Benefits

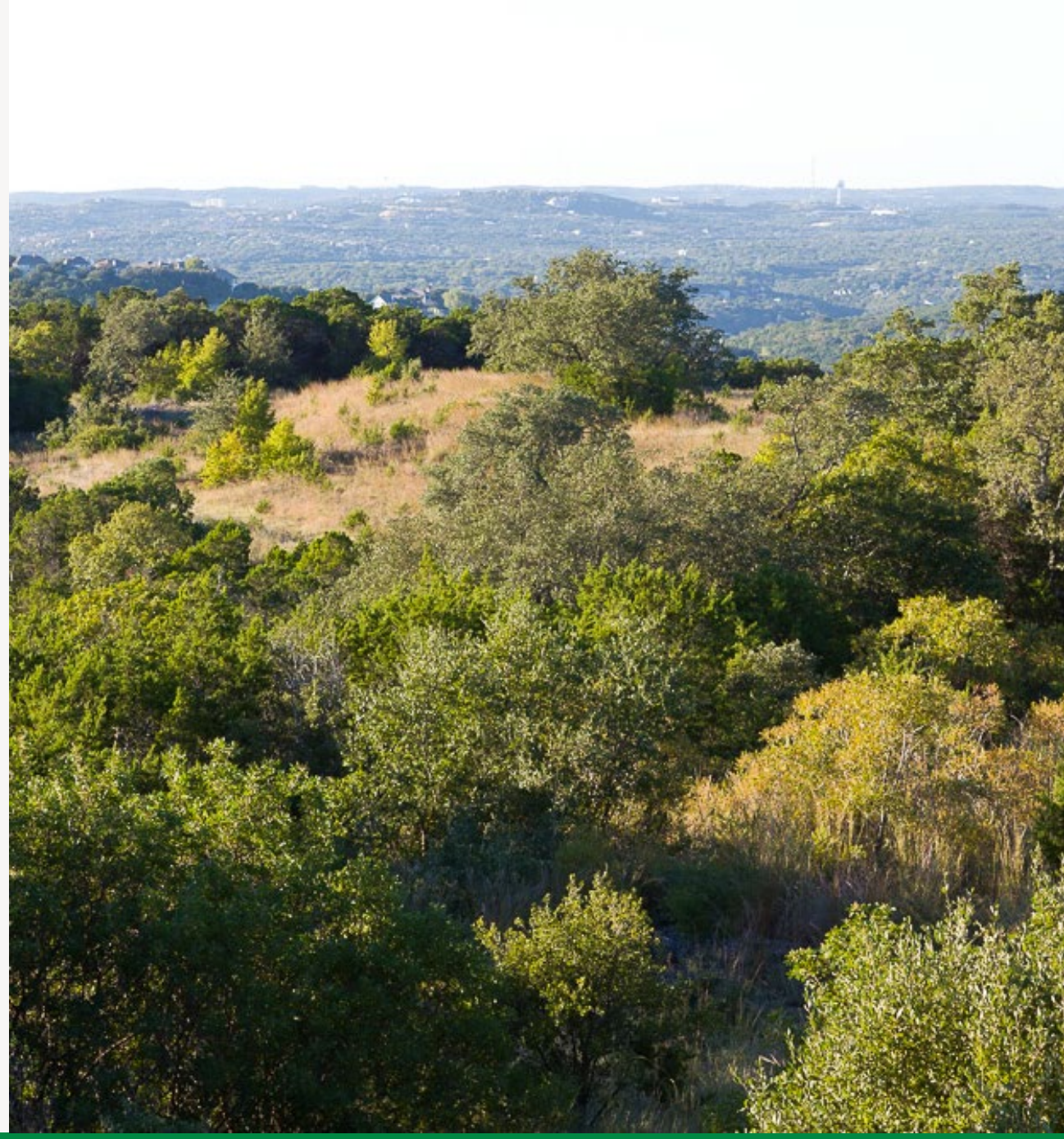
- A community commitment to some of Austin's most cherished places
- Preservation of working landscapes through partnerships with private ranchers, farmers, and conservationists
- Community health benefits, including urban heat reduction, air quality, water quality
- Opportunities for innovative projects, including recharge enhancement
- Protected lands do not generate traffic, pollutants, or other demands for City services



Ecological Benefits

Active land management yields:

- Ecological resilience through large, connected, protected landscapes
- Water quality and quantity protection
- Ecosystem services
- Riparian corridor protection
- Biodiversity protection
- Endangered species habitat
- Carbon sequestration
- Dark skies

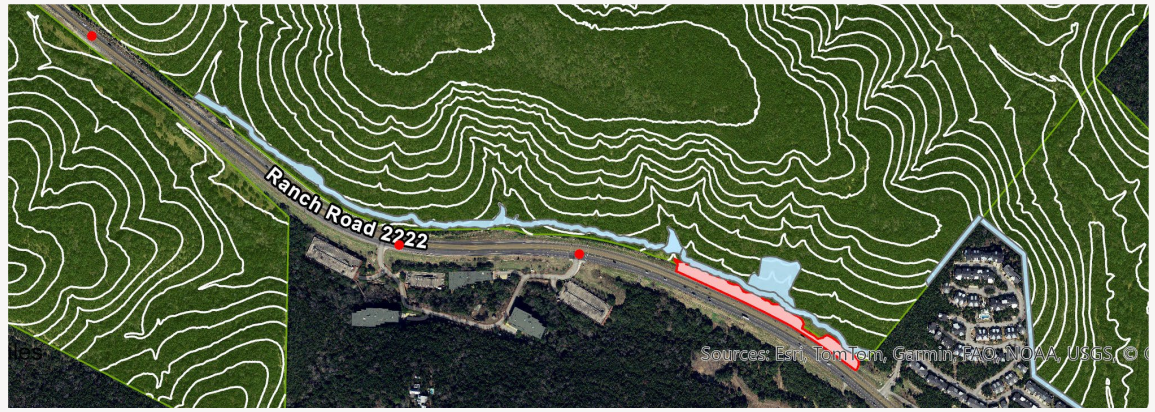




Challenges & Opportunities

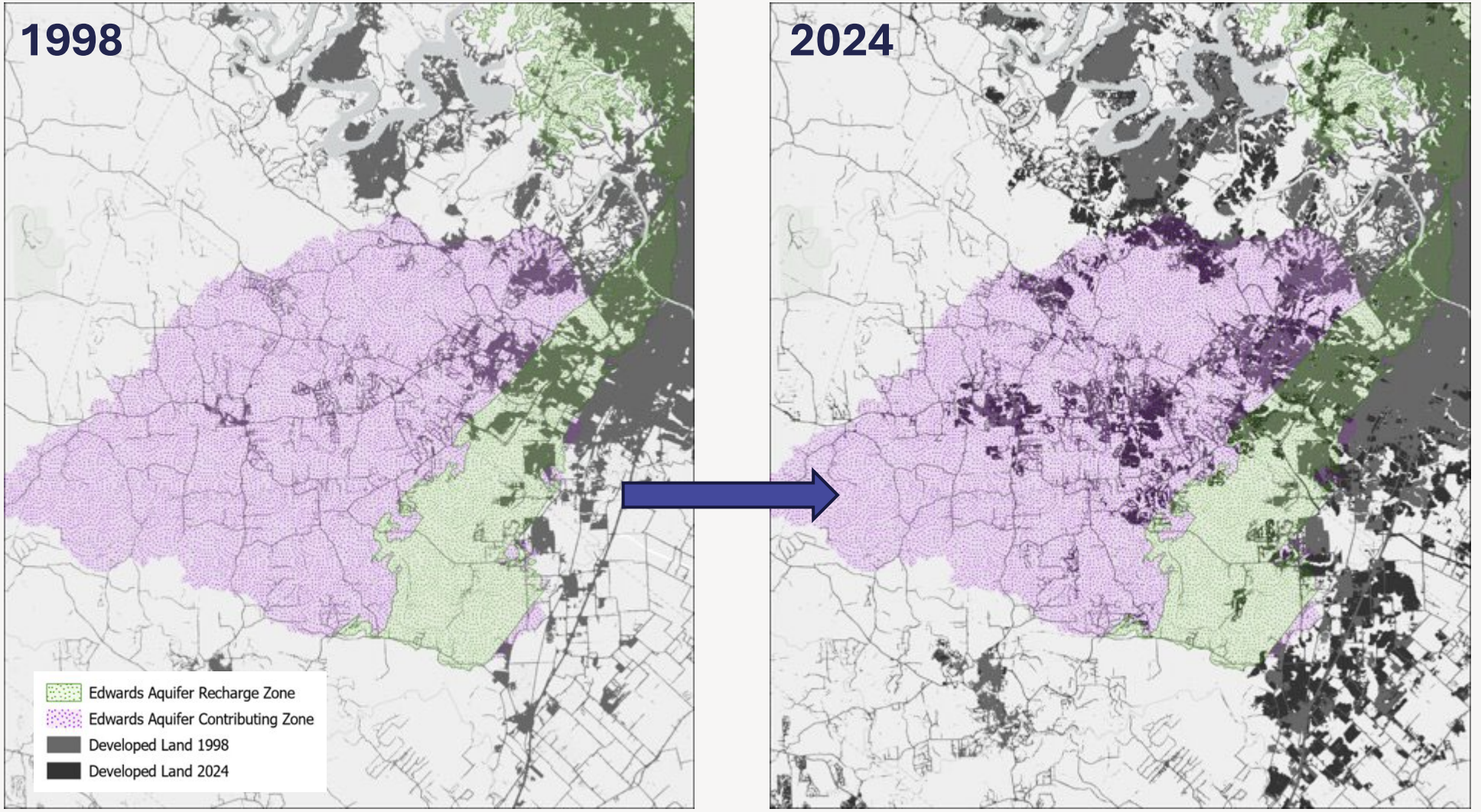
Climate Change & Wildfire Risk

- **Austin Water wildfire mitigation objectives:**
  - Understand wildfire risk
  - Develop actionable strategies
  - Execute effective projects
  - Develop and leverage partnerships
  - Build community awareness and understanding
- **Strategies**:
  - Boundary and ignition corridor fuels treatments
  - Prescribed fire
  - Ecosystem restoration and resilience





Development Continues



23,000+
acres
developed

6,800+
acres
protected under Proposition D (2018)

Condemnation Threats

- Condemnation is one of the greatest threats to the viability of the City's Wildlands
  - Leads to direct impacts, habitat fragmentation, water quality impacts and risks
- **Threat is acute**:
  - Single large landowner, lower valuation of lands with conservation easements, bias to condemn where there is/will be limited resistance
- **Strategies**:
  - Project tracking and early engagement
  - Ongoing coordination with Law Department, conservation partners



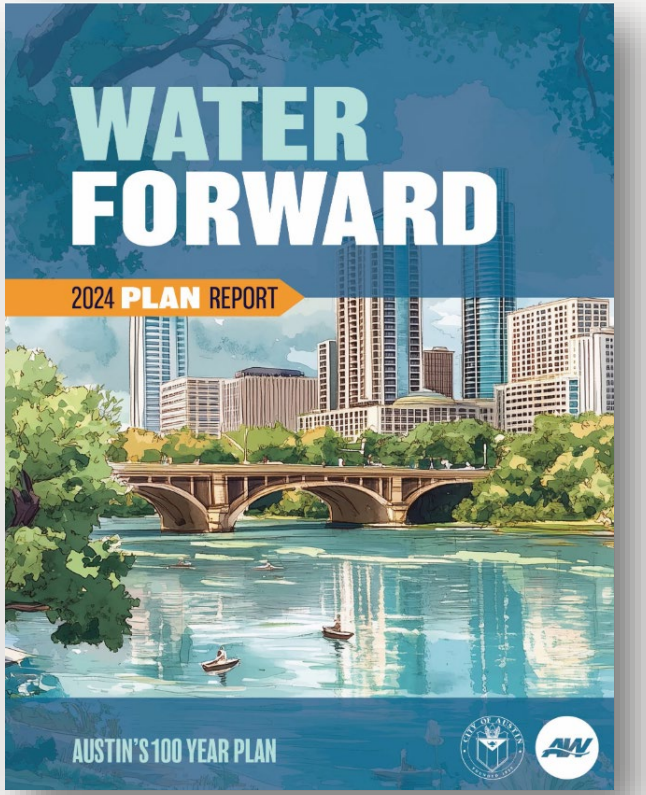
Managing Public Access

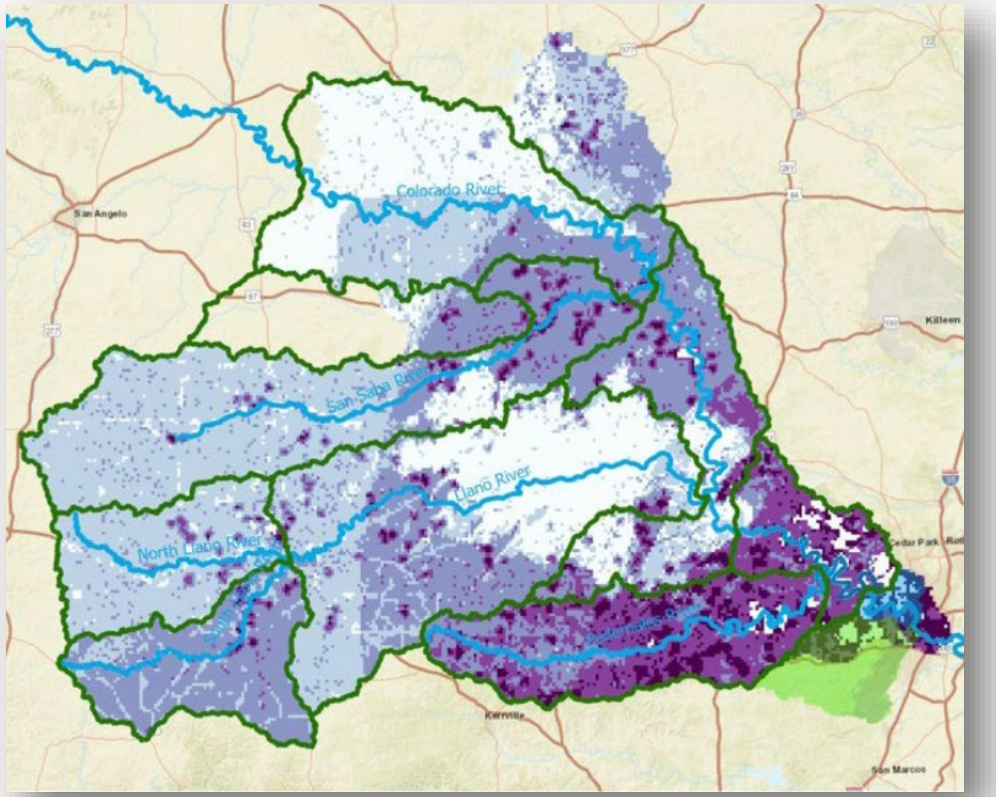
- **Recreation is a part of the Wildlands,** but demand is increasing
  - 12+ miles of publicly accessible trails on Austin Water properties
  - 30+ miles of publicly accessible trails on co-managed BCP properties
  - Recreational access to BCP permit caves, co-managed with APR
  - Guided hikes, volunteer programs, etc.
- Public access impacts sensitive natural resources; it requires active management and adequate resources to mitigate impacts
- **Strategies:** Monitoring of trail use and impacts, expanded partnerships



Working Today. Preparing for Tomorrow.

Using lessons learned from the Wildlands to inform long-term protection of our water supply





Thank you!

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Building Austin's water future, together.

Austin

Water and Wastewater Commission

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