



EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - November 2022



Different Journeys Same Boat

NHCP brings people together to preserve endangered species and community growth

Valerie Covey, NHCP Board President at the Williamson County Courthouse

If you go to the National HCP Coalition's (NHCP) website, the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) can be found on the front page and featured as a regional success story. While the National HCP Coalition is only seven years old, it is quickly gaining momentum throughout the country by championing a message of "balance" in protecting endangered species while facilitating economic growth.

"We've seen in our own county that both developers and local governments can get behind protecting endangered species when they know what the game rules in implementing a habitat conservation plan are up front," said Valerie Covey, who is the NHCP board president and a Williamson County Commissioner. "We are a young organization but I think we've progressed quickly because we focus on informing anyone who might be affected by the Endangered Species Act permit process about what to expect and how they can minimize their own permit acquisition times and costs."

Different Journeys, Same Boat - Continued

Covey explained the National Coalition started through some informal discussions between groups in Texas and California who were developing and managing their own habitat conservation plans. The California groups had been meeting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and in November 2015, the Texas-California collaboration got together at the USFWS' National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia to discuss the status and effectiveness of large-scale HCPs. It was agreed that a national HCP Coalition was needed, and that group



Texas Cave Tour in Williamson County

adopted the Coalition's mission and established initial committees. The first NHCP annual meeting was held in 2016 and have continued since. More than 100 attendees from all over the U.S. took part in the 2019 annual meeting. That number nearly doubled for this year's meeting held in Austin.

"Our early meetings were held in West Virginia but the group decided it would be beneficial to hold our conferences where actual endangered species habitat was being protected," Covey noted. "Our first meeting away from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife training center was in Florida. Texas was next on the places to visit but that conference was delayed by the COVID issues. We did hold meetings online during that ordeal, but we were really happy to get the Austin conference scheduled and held this year. There's really nothing like meeting in person and we were able to get back to our original plans of giving attendees the opportunity to see the habitats in person."

At the Austin meeting, attendees had the choice of three field tours to get an up close experience of various endangered species protection programs being implemented in Central Texas.

The Texas Cave Tour in Williamson County took attendees underground to inspect the habitat for three karst invertebrates the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has listed as endangered. The County also provides habitat for other rare species, including at least four species of salamander, two bird species and 19 species of karst invertebrates. In the next 30 years, population in the County is expected to grow from under 400,000 to more than 1.5 million. And, an estimated 69 percent of that growth is projected to occur in the karst zone, where most of the endangered and rare species and their habitat occur.

The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan tour featured an in-depth look at how the EAHCP partners are protecting several threatened and endangered species that inhabit the Edwards Aquifer and its spring systems. Conference attendees visited the San Marcos Aquatic Resource Center to learn about husbandry and applied research of the EAHCP. Participants then took a glass bottom boat ride over Spring Lake in San Marcos to view several threatened and endangered species up close in the wild.

Different Journeys, Same Boat - Continued

The Springs and Songbirds tour in Austin provided insights on the management for both the Barton Springs and Austin Blind salamanders at famed Zilker Park. Participants learned about restoration efforts and current monitoring at a municipal spring-fed pool which is the habitat for the endangered Barton Springs



Salamander. Participants also visited the largest known population of the endangered Barton Springs salamanders at Eliza Springs. Attendees then got a guided tour of the Reicher Ranch where the HCP focus is on the endangered Golden-cheeked warbler and several cave invertebrates.

“We received some great feedback about the three tours and so we know the field trip aspect of the National HCP Coalition’s annual meeting is very much appreciated,” Covey concluded. “Additionally, I think one of the most important aspects of these meetings is that we get to hear from regulators, HCP managers and private company consultants alike and have the opportunity to learn from each other. And it’s these relationships that will help us improve and grow locally and nationally over time.

“Through the National Coalition, you learn quickly that there are a lot of different perspectives about the Endangered Species Act, and sometimes people on both sides of the issue can get very emotional about it. From what I’ve experienced, when people know the rules going into the HCP process and you don’t change the rules on them, groups can play very well together. Early on, developers were having to go through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on their own to get projects done and the costs were sometimes not completely known. That process could take years to get to a conclusion. Now, with HCPs being implemented regionally or locally, public and private parties can work together through the development and implementation of an HCP. That helps smooth out uncertainty and saves both sides time and money while protecting endangered species and their habitats. With that in mind, the National HCP Coalition plans to continue to encourage this regional, collaborative approach to ensuring both protection of newly listed endangered species and the orderly development of communities around them.”

National Habitat Conservation Plan Coalition Conference Comments

“

This year's National HCP Coalition Conference had about 190 people in attendance coming from 20 different states and locations, including Guam. Due to the pandemic, we had to delay the Austin Conference for almost 2 years. During that time, the National HCP Coalition Planning Committee worked hard to keep the momentum going by hosting the annual meeting in an online-virtual setting. When we got the green light to move forward with the Austin conference, the Texas Planning Committee picked up right where we left off in 2019. From a coordinating perspective, the Texas Planning Committee and the National Planning Committee worked really hard to make this event something worth the wait. - **Olivia Ybarra, NHCP Conference Coordinator**

“

As a water resources practitioner in the great State of Texas the work we do is challenging and we don't always get the opportunity to step outside of that specific world of operation. Opportunities like the National HCP Conference provide forums to learn about a wider ecosystem, which includes endangered species protection. This was/is a rewarding opportunity to learn about tools for coexistence – as well as participate in a dialog with peers involved with Habitat Conservation Planning - **Patrick Shriver**

“

I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to learn from folks involved in day-to-day implementation of HCPs around the country and also from experts sharing insights about the latest regulatory and scientific developments. Hearing visitors talk about their experiences on the tours also reminded me not to take for granted the amazing beauty and unique character of the Texas Hill Country and the species that share it with us. - **Myron Hess**

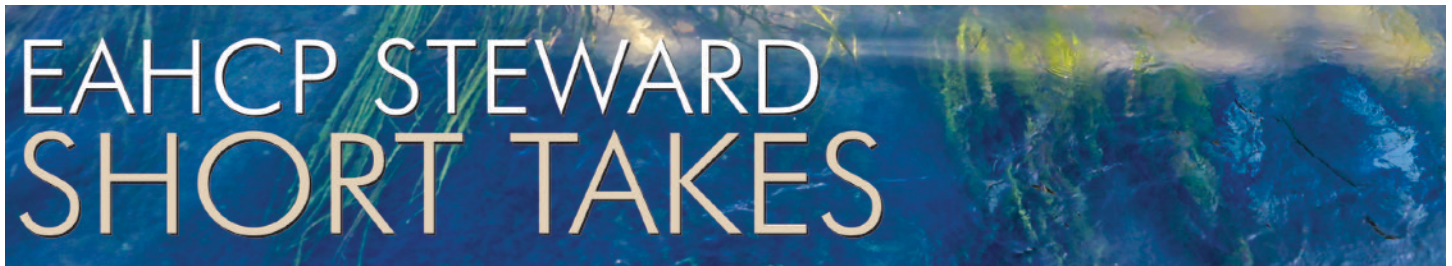
“

I had a great time at the National HCP Coalition Conference. It was very well planned offering a meet and greet, an abundance of discussion topics and a choice of three field trips. The discussion topics provided some great information about climate change, funding and insight to other HCP's. I look forward to attending the conference next year to catch up with people and hear about on all HCP work being done. - **Brandon Payne**

“

The conference was very informative and insightful and brought together a lot of likeminded individuals vested in conserving and preserving habitats for various species. Personally, I gained knowledge of the different ways organizations manage their HCPs, and give kudos to the EAHCP for their conservation work and commitment to spreading awareness for the threatened and endangered species of the Edwards Aquifer. - **Ann-Margaret Gonzalez**





Volunteer Opportunities in San Marcos

Do you live near San Marcos? If so, here are some great opportunities in the month of November to volunteer and help keep San Marcos beautiful.

EVERY Tuesday: Garden Maintenance Workdays

Where: Discovery Center (420 Riverside Dr- across from Herbert's Taco Hut)

Time: 8am-11am

Activity: learn about propagation; trail & demonstration bed maintenance, pond maintenance; tree care; composting ;vegetable garden maintenance; bird watching maintenance

Special instructions: wear close-toed shoes; all tools and supplies are provided

Contact: Eric Weeks (eweeks@sanmarcostx.gov)

EVERY Wednesday: Downtown Clean Up

Where: meet at the San Marcos Chamber of Commerce (202 CM Allen at Hutchison)

Time: 8:30am-11:30am

Activity: landscaping, sticker removal, litter cleanup, painting, and beyond!

Special instructions: only need 3-5 volunteers each time

Contact: Jeremy Gonzales (jgonzales@sanmarcostx.gov)

Saturday Nov 19: Downtown Clean Up

Where: meet at the San Marcos Chamber of Commerce (202 N CM Allen)

Time: 9am-noon

Activity: landscaping, sticker removal, litter cleanup, painting, and beyond!

Special instructions: bring water if want.

Contact: Jeremy Gonzales (jgonzales@sanmarcostx.gov)

Final Joint Stakeholders and ICC Meeting for 2022

Here are the details for the final joint meeting of the EAHCP Implementing Committee and Stakeholders Committee.

Date: December 15, 2022

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: Edwards Aquifer Authority