

# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - December 2022



## Listened and Learned

*EAHCP and ICF release a final report on the Listen and Learn public involvement workshops*

“We listened carefully and we just published a report on what we learned,” said Lucas Bare in regard to the culmination of the EAHCP’s Listen and Learn public involvement workshops. Bare is the ICF project manager for the EAHCP permit renewal process. “Over the past several months, the EAHCP team and ICF consultants conducted four public workshops covering four major topics that will be key components of the EAHCP’s federal permit renewal application. The current permit is for 15 years and expires in early 2028. With the program partners anticipating applying for a longer-term permit this next time around, the first workshop was focused entirely on getting feedback on the approach leadership should pursue for the permit renewal.”



## Listen and Learned - Continued

The federal permit is an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which governs how program permittees will go about protecting endangered species and associated habitat found in the Edwards Aquifer system, primarily in the Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs. The Listen and Learn public involvement series was the first major step in preparing for the incidental take permit (ITP) renewal application.



*Signing up for the Listen and Learn workshop in Hondo.*

Bare explained that the sessions were designed a little differently than the traditional public hearing where the audience is seated auditorium style and then asked to make comments at a central microphone to a panel of people who are just taking in the comments.

“We needed these meetings to be more interactive since many of the stakeholders have been involved in the day-to-day implementation of the current permit programs,” Bare described. “So, we set up the meeting space to have more of an open house feel where people could spend adequate time asking questions and writing out comments. While we did begin each meeting with a general 15 to 20-minute presentation, we dedicated most of the time to allowing people to take in the various displays around the room and interact with EAHCP and ICF staff. Each display addressed specific topics and posed important questions about those topics. We designed that interaction to deliver focused input on what we know the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will want us to cover in the permit renewal document. And, we did get some great feedback on those topics.”

The four meeting topics included the permit renewal approach, biological goals and objectives, climate change and associated system vulnerability, and the current EAHCP conservation measures.

The first workshop, held in San Antonio, focused on potential changes to current program activities, changes to list of endangered species now covered in the permit, and then the length of the next permit. Most comments on the changes to current program activities centered on increasing recreation management, adding watershed protecting major construction projects, and adding more maintenance of diversion equipment for clearing non-native riparian species encroaching on native habitats. For the permit duration recommendations, comments ranged from 15 years to 50 years, with the median at approximately 30 years.

## Listen and Learned - Continued

Workshop 2, held in Hondo, addressed the topic of biological goals and objectives. At this meeting participants were asked to think about the hierarchical relationship between their vision for the EAHCP and how the biological goals and objectives might support that vision.



The recommendations included expanding public information programs to create greater public awareness about the environmental sensitivity of the Comal and San Marcos Springs; continuing and enhancing programs that ensure adequate spring flows to protect the covered species; and, expanding the number of conservation easements that will naturally protect the endangered species and habitats. In addition to the “visionary” type of input, participants were asked more pointed questions about existing biological objectives, including how the EAHCP might make them more specific, measurable and achievable, and how those programs should be monitored.

Workshop 3, held in San Marcos, centered on the topic of climate change and how that could possibly affect the overall Edwards Aquifer ecosystem’s vulnerability. Participants were asked about which effects of climate change concern them the most and which of the endangered species they thought could be impacted most. There were no responses from participants saying they were “not concerned with potential changes in the climate cycles over time.” So, all respondents expressed some level of support for pursuing an analysis of potential issues the EAHCP might encounter with climate change in future decades. The endangered species most often referred to as vulnerable to changing atmospheric temperatures were the San Marcos Salamander, Texas wild-rice, and fountain darter.

The topic for workshop 4, held in New Braunfels, was on the current EAHCP conservation measures. Meeting attendees included various staff and other professionals involved in implementing these measures, so the feedback received at the fourth workshop was very specific and detailed. The top three items respondents noted as very important included the management of public recreation, aquatic vegetation restoration and non-native species control and maintenance. very successful and should not be changed.



## Listen and Learned - Continued



*Lucas Bare and Kimberly Meitzen at the Listen and Learn workshop in San Marcos.*

“Moving forward, we will be developing detailed analyses of the currently covered activities, covered species, biological goals and objectives, and conservation measures,” Bare stated. “The input from the workshops and the information we received from those who chose to comment online will help us identify what potential changes the new ITP permit could benefit from, and what parts of the programs are already very successful and should not be changed.”

“Overall, I’ve been impressed with how engaged people are with this plan and process. From a facilitator’s perspective, it was energizing to know that people understand the importance of this program and how the associated permit protects the overall Edwards Aquifer ecosystem. I know many of the attendees have been associated with the aquifer’s management for a long time and getting to know them through these interactive workshops has been beneficial. We’ve found that long-term success for these types of programs really requires the building of solid relationships so the group can tackle tough issues together. And, in our role going forward, knowing the people involved and their perspectives on the issues will definitely help us in developing a very solid application for the EAHCP’s permit renewal in 2028.”



# EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

## Implementing and Stakeholders Committees Officers Set for 2023

Next year's Implementing Committee and Stakeholders Committee officers were announced at the December IC meeting. The new group of officers presiding over EAHCP business in 2023 will be:

**Implementing Committee:** Chair: Donovan Burton (SAWS); Vice-Chair: Tom Taggart (City of San Marcos); Secretary: Roland Ruiz (EAA).

**Stakeholders Committee:** Myron Hess (Texas Living Waters Project); Kimberley Meitzen (Texas State University); Patrick Shriver (SAWS).

## EAHCP Bids Happy Retirement to Brock Curry

Brock Curry (right) has announced his retirement from the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) and the EAHCP team wished him well at the December meeting. Scott Stormont (left), the EAHCP program manager, presented Brock with a framed memento. As deputy general manager, Brock was involved in many aspects of the EAA's participation in the EAHCP. Happy Retirement Brock!





# EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS!



We hope you join us for great new  
EAHCP adventures in 2023.

