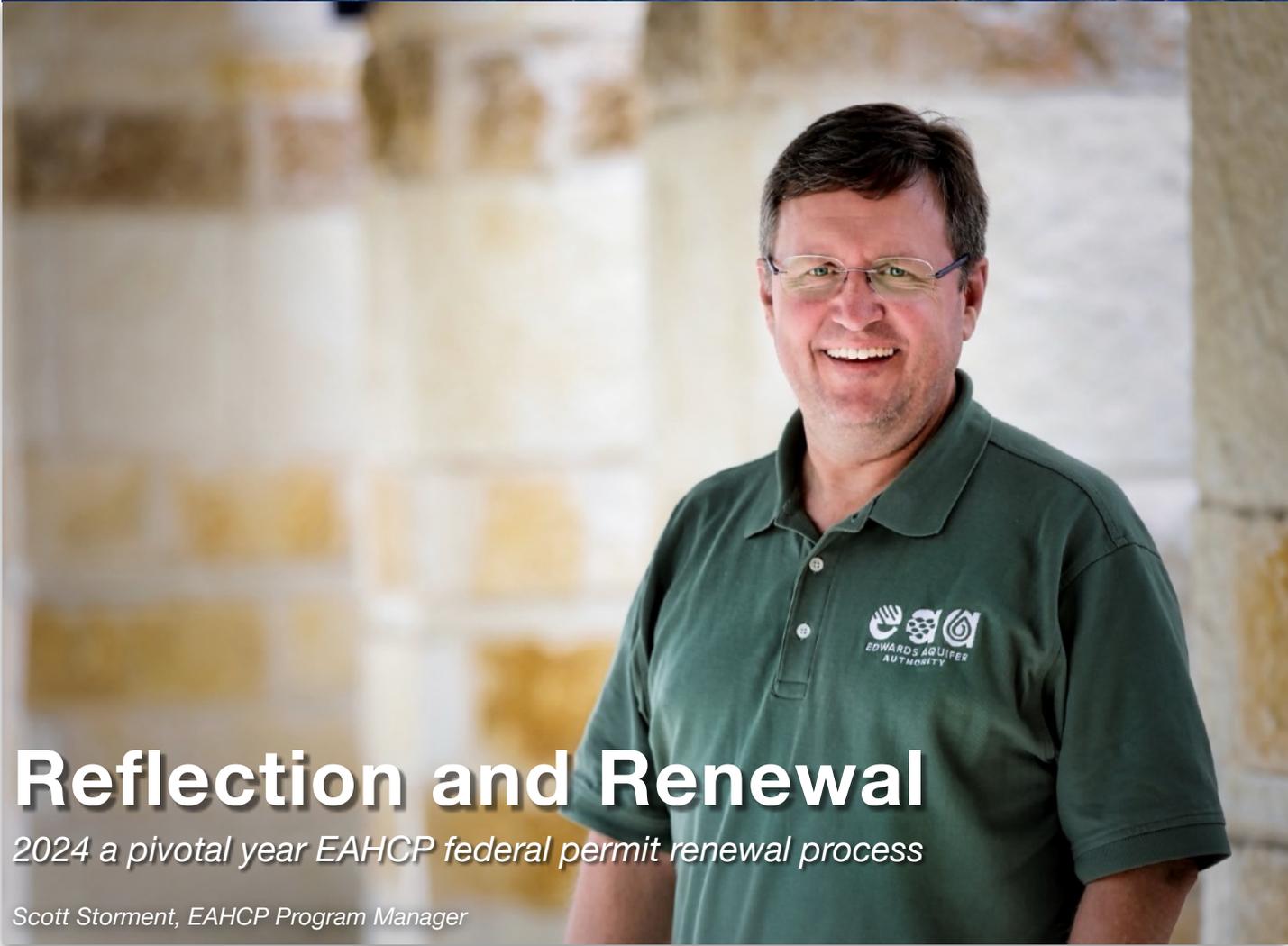


# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - Jan.-Feb. 2024



## Reflection and Renewal

*2024 a pivotal year EAHCP federal permit renewal process*

*Scott Stoment, EAHCP Program Manager*

**T**wo years ago, Scott Stoment did an interview about the kickoff of the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan's (EAHCP) Incidental Take Permit (ITP) renewal process. With the actual deadline six years away from 2022, Stoment presciently forecasted that time would pass quickly and there was a full schedule of work to accomplish before the EAHCP submitted a permit renewal application. Despite the relatively long lead time, there seemed to be a feeling of having an impending deadline to meet. The headline of the 2022 article read, "Time Flies." It has and as usual, it will continue to do so. And that feeling of a tight project timeframe persists as well.

## Reflection and Renewal - Continued



*EAA Region covered by the USFWS Incidental Take Permit and the list of EAHCP permittees.*

“The current ITP was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 15 years and that permit expires in 2028,” Storment, the EAHCP’s program manager said. “Due to our success so far in meeting all aspects of the current permit, we are expecting to apply for a 30-year permit for the upcoming renewal. Because of that, we wanted to do a thorough public involvement program, take a deep dive into existing science and data, coordinate proposed changes to existing programs with our stakeholder and leadership committees, and then take a look at new science such as how our naturally changing climate might impact our programs over a three-decade horizon. So, while six-year planning period seemed a bit lengthy to some, there were others who felt we were cutting it a bit close.”

The EAHCP federal permit is an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which authorizes the “take” of a threatened or endangered species from lawful activities. The EAHCP describes how program permittees of the ITP will manage and mitigate the protection of listed species and associated habitats found in the Edwards Aquifer system, primarily in the Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs.

Storment said the team, which includes nationally-recognized consultant ICF, is on track with the four-phase timeline being used to develop the 2028 permit renewal application:

- Listen and Learn Phase - a stakeholder involvement process that ran throughout 2022.
- Analyze Phase - a means to identify need for more data gathering through studies.
- Sign Off Phase - a period of time for EAHCP partners to review and ultimately approve the components of the comprehensive permit renewal document.
- Document Phase - a comprehensive document will be written and submitted to the USFWS.

ICF project leader Lucas Bare noted at the end of 2022 he was very pleased to see that people attending the Listen and Learn sessions understood the inherent importance of protecting the overall Edwards Aquifer ecosystem. He said that their experience shows that long-term success for these types of federal programs requires the building of solid relationships so the group can tackle tough issues together.

“We heavily relied on the Listen and Learn report to help us navigate through the Analyze Phase that occurred in 2023,” Storment explained. “At the conclusion of the public workshops, ICF drafted some general memos regarding stakeholders and public input on the perceived strengths, weaknesses, successes, failures of the existing biological goals and objectives, and springflow protection measures. ICF also documented which program elements should be enhanced or deleted. In a parallel process, staff worked with various subcommittees to draft a series of recommendations for the EAHCP Implementing Committee (IC), specifically the HCP’s permittees, to review. One subcommittee developed a list of biological goals and a subsequent subcommittee produced objectives based on the previous subcommittee’s goals.”

## Reflection and Renewal - Continued



*Lucas Bare, ICF, facilitates a Listen and Learn public meeting.*

Stormont said that by the fall of 2024, the staff and subcommittees will produce an overall "Conservation Strategy", for ICF to consider in its initial preparation of an actual application document that in 2025 the permittees and IC will review, comment on and eventually approve for submittal to USFWS.

"The Conservation Strategy will be made up of the biological goals, objectives and conservation measures subcommittee recommendations. As

mentioned, two of the subcommittees have completed their work. The Conservation Measures Subcommittee will start up toward the end of February and produce a final report by October of this year. They will be using the previous subcommittees' biological goals and objectives IC-approved recommendations to guide their work."

Recently, the Implementation Committee produced a guiding memo for the Conservation Measures Subcommittee to follow in its work over the next several months. The memo's main charges advise the committee should:

- review the HCP Handbook as it pertains to Conservation Measure purpose and structure;
- receive an overview of the Biological Goals and Biological Objectives Subcommittee recommendations;
- use the best available science and knowledge of the current HCP experience to determine the needed Conservation Measures;
- review the current EAHCP Conservation Measures (EAHCP § 5.0);
- consider the effects of climate change and other potential variables relative to the proposed HCP period;
- review and provide feedback on draft Conservation Measures developed and provided by EAHCP staff; and,
- finalize and approve Conservation Measure recommendations to be provided to the EAHCP Implementing Committee before submission to the EAHCP Permit Renewal contractor (ICF).

The Conservation Measures are truly the heart of the EAHCP. They include the springflow protection measures which are key to the Edwards Aquifer Region's ability to protect endangered species and habitats during a repeat of the drought of record. Essentially, as water levels in the Edwards Aquifer decline and reach different trigger points, the springflow protection measures curtail aquifer pumping in varying degrees.

## Reflection and Renewal - Continued



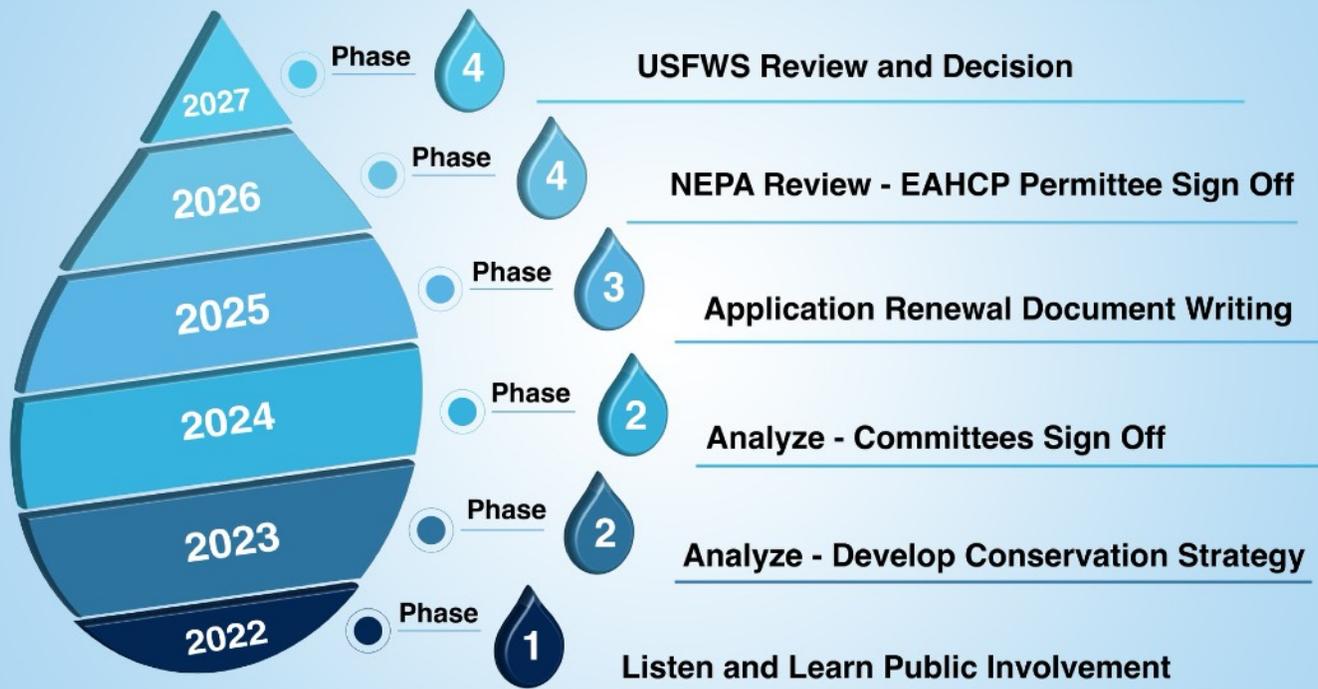
Nearly three years ago, the Edwards Aquifer Authority's computer models verified that the ASR, VISPO and Critical Period Management measures were effective in helping the Comal and San Marcos Springs continue to flow even under extremely low-flow conditions. Conservation Measures also include activities for habitat protection and supporting research.

“We have constructed a transparent, interactive process for how the drafting of our permit application renewal will play out,” Storment concluded. “We wanted all stakeholders and the Implementing Committee to have the opportunity to review and comment on major components of the new application over a period of time. That way, no one is inundated with a huge data dump at the end of the process and required to make serious decisions on very important documents under time constraints pressures. Additionally, we have been and will continue to work very closely with the USFWS staff to ensure we don't surprise them with any part of our application. Their charge is to balance human socio-economic needs with nature's needs in these permits, so it only makes sense for us to work together step by step to produce a well-vetted, science-based application that benefits us all. At this point, I feel confident that when we complete our application renewal process, we will have a well-circulated, scientifically-sound document the EAHCP permittees can be confident in signing.”

To stay up to date with the EAHCP Permit Renewal Process, please visit: <https://www.eahcrenewal.org/>

- The Conservation Measures Subcommittee members include:
- Texas State University: Represented by Kimberly Meitzen
- City of San Marcos: Represented by Mark Enders
- City of New Braunfels: Represented by Phillip Quast
- San Antonio Water System: Represented by Linda Bevis
- Edwards Aquifer Authority: Represented by Marc Friberg
- Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority: Represented by Daniel Large
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Bexar County Interest): Kerim Jacaman
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Recreational Interest): Melani Howard
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Agricultural Interest): Adam Yablonski
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Environmental Interest): Myron Hess

## EAHCP USFWS Incidental Take Permit Renewal Timeline



### Phase 1: Listen and Learn

- **Description:** Four Listen and Learn workshops were conducted as the first phase of the permit renewal process for the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan. Workshops were conducted to receive input and data sources from members of the community and other interested parties about important topics to the permit renewal process, including the approach to the permit renewal, biological goals and objectives, climate change and system vulnerability, and conservation measures.
- **Dates:** March 2022 – December 2022

### Phase 2: Analyze and Sign-Off

- **Description:** The Analyze and Sign-off Phase of the permit renewal process will examine the major components of the EAHCP (e.g., Covered Activities, Covered Species, Conservation Measures) and identify potential changes to the EAHCP and ITP to be considered by the Implementing Committee. Changes identified and “signed-off” by the Implementing Committee will be carried forward to be included in the process to create the amended EAHCP submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with the ITP amendment application.
- **Dates:** October 2022 – July 2025

### Phase 3: Document

- **Description:** Phase 3 starts the initial development of the amended EAHCP document. Several drafts of this document will be managed by ICF and EAHCP Staff. Finalized documents will be presented to EAHCP Committees and the USFWS for review and sign-off.
- **Dates:** August 2025 – March 2026

### Phase 4: USFWS Review and Decision

- **Description:** Phase 4 includes a NEPA review and accompanying Environmental Impact Statement for the draft EAHCP. The final draft of the EAHCP will also be reviewed and signed-off by the EAHCP Implementing Committee for final submittal to the USFWS.
- **Dates:** August 2025 – November 2027

# EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

[Listen to this month's EAHCP Steward Podcast by clicking here.](#)

## How to Access EAHCP Committee Documents

The EAHCP Committee documents are available at this link: [www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/r1ku53l7gz446edghx91l/How-To-Access-EAHCP-Committee-Meeting-Documents-on-EAA-Legistar\\_v3.mp4?rlkey=gr0qg4hodp47w47ekcnsep1r&dl=0](http://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/r1ku53l7gz446edghx91l/How-To-Access-EAHCP-Committee-Meeting-Documents-on-EAA-Legistar_v3.mp4?rlkey=gr0qg4hodp47w47ekcnsep1r&dl=0)

## 2024 EAHCP Information Online

Date	Time	Location	Committee
February 1, 2024	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa Community Hall – San Marcos, TX	Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committees
March 28, 2024	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority	Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committees
April 18, 2024	9:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority	Science Committee
May 23, 2024	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa Community Hall – San Marcos, TX	Implementing Committee
July 25, 2024	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority	Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committees
September 5, 2024	9:00 AM	Meadows Center	Science Committee
September 19, 2024	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority	Implementing Committee
October 10, 2024	10:00 AM	City of New Braunfels – City Hall (Tejas Room)	Implementing Committee
December 19, 2024	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority	Joint Stakeholder, Science, and Implementing Committees

Note: All meetings will be accessible to attend online via Microsoft Teams. Agendas and meeting details will be sent a week prior to the meeting date.

You can also download the 2024 EAHCP calendar at this link: [www.edwardsaquifer.org/habitat-conservation-plan/eahcp-calendar/](http://www.edwardsaquifer.org/habitat-conservation-plan/eahcp-calendar/)