



EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - March-April 2023



Undertake One for the Team

EAHCP Awarded \$1 Million Grant for Federal Permit Renewal Work

When you watch Snoopy do his happy dance, you can't help but smile. And, you're probably hearing that upbeat Charlie Brown music in your head right now. The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) staff recently had a great reason to break out their own happy dance moves as a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was awarded to the Edwards Aquifer Authority for the EAHCP's permit renewal work.

Undertake One for the Team - Continued

The funds are authorized in Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and partly funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (CESCF). This year, Habitat Conservation Plan programs across the country will be receiving \$9.1 million in funding to support the development, renewal or amendment of HCPs, safe harbor agreements and candidate



conservation agreements. The total awards, which include HCPs, land acquisition and other program funding, will amount to \$66.7 million.

“While we were confident that the EAHCP would receive some sort of funding in this round of the CESCF grant program, we weren’t sure what the amount would be,” said Olivia Ybarra, Habitat Conservation Coordinator II. “So, yes, it was very nice to see that big number come in and we did celebrate that accomplishment with the team. This is the second grant award the EAHCP has received from this fund and we will definitely be watching for future opportunities.”

The USFWS works with States to implement the Section 6 grants. And while the ESA is primarily focused on protecting endangered species and their habitats, USFWS states that it wants to do so by fostering good relationships among all partners and to balance species protection plans with local communities’ need for economic development.

While there are several ways these types of dollars can be spent on HCP programs, EAHCP Program Manager Scott Stormont says they will be directing the grant funds toward renewing the EAHCP’s current federal permit which expires in 2028.

“We have been working with our project consultant in implementing a detailed permit renewal work plan which will run over the next three to four years. And while we haven’t received the green light to spend the grant funds just yet, we will essentially put the dollars to use for the tasks associated with where we are in our program timeline when the funds become available. Part of the grant award requirements is that we provide a 25 percent match to the overall award amount. Since we already have an approved budget to fund the permit renewal work, we did not have to find additional dollars to meet the grant match requirement.”

To be considered for funding under the CESCF, the EAHCP proposal had to include at least one federally listed, candidate or at-risk endangered species. Additionally, applicants had to demonstrate how their proposed planning effort will benefit the species, provide a detailed list of activities proposed for funding and outline a completion timeline for those program tasks.

Undertake One for the Team - Continued

“The grant application document is about 30 pages long, so you have to methodically go through each portion of the guidelines to make sure you don’t miss any required elements,” Ybarra explained. “We were fortunate to have a great resource at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) who helped us ensure our application was on point. In fact, we met with TPWD several times before we ever started writing. Additionally, TPWD will be the agency we work with to confirm we are managing the grant dollars appropriately. The money actually flows through TPWD before it reaches us.”



Ybarra, who was the project manager for the application, expounded on the number of team members who participated in developing specific portions of the document. She recognized Kristina Tolman for assistance on maps and GIS components, Damon Childs for budget preparation and analysis, and Dr. Chad Furl and Kristy Smith focusing on scientific research and planning components. She also worked closely with Storment and Jamie Childers in reviewing the wording approach for the proposal.

“As the funds begin to arrive for the EAHCP to use, we will have timelines to produce specific deliverables outlined in our application and that work will be observed by TPWD,” Ybarra noted. “However, since our EAHCP federal permit renewal process must be closely coordinated with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, they will get to see first-hand how we progress in meeting our grant requirements. In the end, all three agencies want this to be a successful process since the direct beneficiaries will be those endangered species the EAHCP is designed to protect.”

One interesting aspect of these grant programs is that they also contribute to the “America the Beautiful” initiative’s goal to conserve, connect and restore 30 percent of the Nation’s lands and waters by 2030. Those goals are to be achieved by protecting biodiversity, slowing species extinction rates, and facilitating State and local conservation and restoration efforts in coordination with private landowners and communities.

“Obviously, this is a significant grant award and the project team, led by Olivia, did a really nice job in putting the application together,” Storment concluded. “However, we would be remiss in not acknowledging that over the past 10 years, the EAHCP has been a very successful program and there are many professionals throughout the Edwards Region who have worked very hard to get us to this point today. And I’m certain that this program’s recognition as being a model HCP in the U.S. immensely helped our prospects for obtaining this valuable grant.”

[You can read EAHCP’s program abstract, USFWS award letter and view the complete list of the program awards here.](#)

EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

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

Detailed EAHCP Meeting Calendar is Now Online

If you need the most current information about EAHCP meetings, you're only one click away. The new EAHCP meeting calendar is now ready for your convenience. [Just click here.](#) then bookmark it.

The Endangered Species Act: Celebrating 50 Years of Success in Wildlife Conservation

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), providing the opportunity to reflect on the progress made and the work ahead for protecting our nation's endangered species and their habitats. The Act has saved hundreds of species, to include those supported by the Edwards Aquifer water and habitat, from extinction and continues to protect and preserve some of our most beloved animals and plants. It has also helped to create a better understanding of how human activities can impact the environment and how we can work together to protect it.

In its first 50 years, the ESA has been credited with saving 99% of listed species from extinction thanks to the collaborative actions of federal agencies, state, local and Tribal governments, conservation organizations and private citizens. [You can read about some of the most iconic ESA success stories here.](#)

Thank You Chuck Ahrens!

Congratulations to Chuck Ahrens (left) on his retirement from the EAA. Scott Storment presented a memento of appreciation from the EAHCP team for Chuck's work on the springflow protection programs.

Chuck has been in the water business for 36 years. He spent 10 years at the Edwards Underground Water District (predecessor of the EAA) before moving to BexarMet for 10 years. He served 10 years in the water resources department at San Antonio Water System before returning to the EAA. Chuck was a part of the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program which was critical to getting the EAHCP started. Thank you Chuck for your many contributions to preserving the Edwards Aquifer!



Follow the Progress of the ITP Renewal Process Online

You can keep up with all of the ITP renewal progress by bookmarking the website at: www.eahcprenewal.org.