

News Release

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An Update on the Status of the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan Covered Species

San Antonio, TX – A few months ago, in October, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) officially delisted the San Marcos Gambusia (*Gambusia georgei*) for protection under the Endangered Species Act due to extinction. The final rule to delist this species was included in a total of 21 species delisted from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to extinction, the other 20 species are not a part of the covered species for the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP). Furthermore, the final rule was published in the Federal Register and effective November 16, 2023 (Williams, 2023a).

Additionally, the Texas troglobitic water slater (*Lirceolus smithii*) was removed from the petitioned list last month by the USFWS following a thorough review of the best available scientific and commercial information (Williams, 2023b).

Lastly, in 2020 the petition for the listing of the Comal Springs salamander was withdrawn (Evaluation of Covered Species for the Amended EAHCP, 2023, pg. 2).

Although these species have either been removed for listing under the Endangered Species Act or from the petitioned list, the species will remain on the Covered Species List of the EAHCP through the remaining term of the current Incidental Take Permit (ITP) covering the Edwards Aquifer, which expires March 31, 2028.

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Consequently, the delisting of these species do not have an impact on the status of the current EAHCP, but they do alleviate any concern that these species will need to be accounted for in any future iteration of an HCP for the Edwards Aquifer.



Currently, the habitat protection measures in place through the EAHCP apply to the Texas Blind Salamander, Fountain Darter, San Marcos Salamander, Texas Wild-rice, Comal Springs Riffle Beetle, Peck’s Cave Amphipod, Comal Springs Dryopid Beetle, and the recent delisted species and will continue to be carried out.

The USFWS Proposal to List Two Cave-Dwelling Catfish Species

In recent news, the USFWS recently reopened their public comment period on their proposal to list the Toothless blindcat (*Trogloglanis pattersoni*) and the Widemouth blindcat (*Satan eurystomus*) as endangered species, which will be open until January 8, 2024.

The EAA does not see the need to submit additional comments and stands by the technical comments submitted to USFWS thus far, with the following official statement:

We believe that to propose listing these species now is premature. The best available science regarding the distribution, status and potential protection of both the Toothless blindcat and the Widemouth blindcat is extremely limited and, in our opinion, needs further study prior to determining whether listing them is appropriate.

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The Permit Renewal Process

In April 2022, The Edwards Aquifer Authority Board of Directors approved a contract to perform technical services to plan for a permit renewal for when the initial permit expires in 2028.



The permit renewal of the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan is a four-phase process. To learn more about this process, please visit <https://www.eahcrenewal.org/>

About the EAHCP

The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) defines how we protect federally listed species that live in the Edwards Aquifer-fed Comal and San Marcos springs. Our program's Incidental Take Permit was granted to the Edwards Aquifer Authority, City of San Marcos, City of New Braunfels, Texas State University, and the City of San Antonio acting by and through the San Antonio Water System (collectively known as the EAHCP Permittees) to protect federally listed species from specific activities, Covered Activities, like groundwater pumping.

About the EAA

The EAA regulates the portion of the Balcones Fault Zone Edwards Aquifer – a jurisdictional area that provides water to two-and-one-half million people and covers more than 8,000 square miles across eight counties. These include all of Uvalde, Medina, and Bexar counties as well as parts of Atascosa, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Comal, and Hays counties. For 27 years the Edwards Aquifer Authority has carried out its mission of managing, enhancing, and protecting the Edwards Aquifer. For more information, please visit www.edwardsaquifer.org.

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References

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Williams, M. (2023b, November 29). *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Seven Species Not Warranted for Listing as Endangered or Threatened Species*. Regulations.gov.

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