



# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - May-June 2023



## Goals for Guidance

*EAHCP Subcommittee Advances Big Picture Goals for ITP Renewal Work*

In a recent blog post for Indeed, the number one job website in the country, Career Coach Jamie Birt explained that having a big-picture perspective can help you prioritize effectively, set better goals and improve time management. She said developing a complete perspective of a situation up front will help drive decisions that produce positive long-term results.

## Goals for Guidance - Continued

Birt is right on target with those observations not only for people looking for new employment opportunities, but for describing the EAHCP's Biological Goals Subcommittee's recently completed work process as well.

The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) is currently in the process of renewing the Incidental Take Permit with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As part of that process, the

existing components of the EAHCP conservation strategy needed to be reassessed, new elements recommended, and modifications discussed. The Biological Goals Subcommittee was asked to not only reexamine the current EAHCP biological goals but also create a big picture for other subcommittees to work toward.



*Recreation in and along the San Marcos River is addressed in one of the goals of the Biological Goals Subcommittee final report.*

“This was a bit of a different type of exercise for this subcommittee,” noted Kevin Mayes, Chief of Inland Fisheries Science and Policy at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “We were challenged with taking a step back and a broader view in developing the biological goals that would then lead to specific objectives developed by another group to meet the overarching goals. In doing so, we had four tasks to complete. We were to read and understand the current federal handbook that guides HCP planning, review the existing EAHCP biological goals, make recommendations on changes in direction for existing biological goals and then finalize a report that all ITP renewal contractors, stakeholders and committees could work from.”

Subcommittee colleague Dr. Kimberly Meitzen added that the first set of biological goals were developed under different guidelines created by a large coalition of HCP stakeholders prior to the EAHCP's implementation.

“In staying true to how the first set of biological goals were advanced, it was important for us to replicate that diverse set of viewpoints represented on the subcommittee,” said Meitzen, Associate Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at Texas State University. “While we did pare down the number of committee members, we had representatives from the San Marcos River Foundation, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas State University, City of San Marcos and two current EAHCP Science Committee members. Ultimately our committee landed on creating species specific and habitat-based goals.”

As an example of the broader type of thinking this report encompassed, Mayes pointed out that Goal #1 of the report addressed the water quality and quantity needed to maintain habitats for endangered species and the protection of other ecosystem elements such as aquatic and riparian vegetation. He said there were no individual species identified, but rather the entire group of protected animals living in the Edwards Aquifer fed habitats in New Braunfels and San Marcos. Meitzen added that the current Springflow Protections Measures are critical conservation strategies being successfully utilized to protect species during droughts. The committee ensured that those key program elements had a place to integrate into the ITP renewal application.

## Goals for Guidance - Continued

Goal #2 stands out from the others in that the direct human impact on environmentally sensitive habitats is addressed. The Biological Goals Subcommittee considered the mitigation of these impacts important to incorporate as a biological goal due to the expected increase in the human population surrounding the Edwards Aquifer and spring systems.

“Creating awareness and engaging citizens in the EAHCP work is essential if we expect the scientific work to be pursued properly,” Meitzen commented. “All community members can play an active role in conserving water

from the Edwards Aquifer, especially when we’re in drought conditions like we’ve experienced over the past couple of years. In the Comal and San Marcos Springs communities, we have to seriously look at how recreation affects the ecosystem. There are some great programs out there which urge people not to litter or swim near scientifically protected areas in the rivers. So, the committee wanted to ensure that these programs continue and have some room for expansion. That was our thinking for Goal 2.”

Goals three through seven dove into the protection of the individual species currently protected by the EAHCP. Mayes explained that each of the species have defined native environmental elements that they need for food, shelter and reproduction. Meitzen noted that Goal 5 points to species that live deep within the Edwards Aquifer and those which we know the least about. The subcommittee wrote Goal 5 to provide some umbrella-type protections for these species that typically go out of sight and out of mind.

The Biological Goals Subcommittee completed their work in four thorough sessions, the members spent considerable time on creating a glossary of terms and debating the nuances of specific terms.

“While the goals we developed are fairly broad and inclusive, the definitions of key words we used in the report are clearly explained,” Mayes concluded. “For example, the word ‘conserve’ is a common one, but we wanted to make sure that anyone basing future objectives on our goals report knew exactly what we meant when we wrote conserve. Sure, there were some lively discussions about these terms, but in the end, we found common ground on what key terms needed to be highlighted and how we wanted them interpreted.”

“The EAHCP staff, led by Olivia Ybarra, really helped keep us focused on constructing the big picture for the report’s goals as well as helping us manage time by providing recaps of the meetings,” Meitzen said. “The work sessions were efficient and effective due to Chairman Mark Enders’ leadership and the committee members very much appreciate all the behind the scenes work that got us to a solid biological goals report.

“From a big picture standpoint, the EAHCP is fundamentally the most important decision making and implementation tool that exists for conserving Edwards Aquifer spring flow and the species populations and habitats that are dependent on this precious resource. The ongoing work involved in the Incidental Take Permit renewal process is critically important to protecting and managing this resource for future generations including the region’s growing population and all the karst, aquatic, and riparian life forms dependent on Edwards Aquifer spring flow.”



## Goals for Guidance - Continued

### Biological Goals Developed by Subcommittee Members

**Goal 1:** Conserve the quality and quantity of springflow and maintain suitable ecosystems within the Plan Area to provide for the resiliency of the Covered Species.

**Goal 2:** Promote community engagement and awareness of the EAHCP, support land and water conservation, and mitigate anthropogenic stressors and natural disturbances within the Plan Area that will benefit the Covered Species.

**Goal 3:** Conserve habitats, diverse native submerged aquatic vegetation assemblages, and resilient fountain darter populations in the Comal and San Marcos spring and river systems.

**Goal 4:** Conserve and manage resilient Texas wild-rice populations in the San Marcos spring and river system.

**Goal 5:** Conserve habitats to support resilient populations of Texas blind salamander, Comal Springs dryopid beetle, Peck's cave amphipod, Edwards Aquifer diving beetle, and Texas troglobitic water slater in the Plan Area.

**Goal 6:** Conserve habitats to support resilient Comal Springs riffle beetle populations in the Plan Area.

**Goal 7:** Conserve San Marcos spring and river habitats and resilient San Marcos salamander populations in the Plan Area.

Each of these goals came with reasons for their presence and some general biological objectives on which other committees would expand. You can read more about these reasons and objectives in Biological Goals Report.

### Biological Goals Subcommittee Members

**Chair: Mark Enders** (Stakeholder Committee)

**Rachel Sanborn** (Stakeholder Committee)

**Kimberly Meitzen** (Stakeholder Committee)

**Kevin Mayes** (Stakeholder Committee)

**Jacquelyn Duke** (Science Committee)

**Charlie Kreidler** (Science Committee)



# EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

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

## **Sessom Creek Improvements Project Phase 1 is Complete!**



Congratulations to the City of San Marcos and the EAHCP on the completion of Phase 1 on the Sessom Creek Watershed Project.

“We are proud of the innovative solution that was designed and completed using sustainable native materials and vegetation to address a problem that was ultimately impacting the San Marcos River. These upgrades will help stabilize Sessom Creek and protect the San Marcos River for years to come,” said Director of Engineering & Capital Improvements Shaun Condor.

Sessom Creek is a relatively small watershed, but it empties directly into the headwaters of the San Marcos Springs where endangered species and their critical habitat are located. The watershed had become overgrown with nonnative plants and trees which crowded out native plants. That situation, which caused increased erosion in the creek channel was addressed along with the City of San Marcos replacing 1,800 linear feet of old 12-inch sanitary sewer lines.

The EAHCP Steward did a complete rundown of the Sessom Creek Project in its July 2021 issue. You can download that article at the [EAHCP Steward Archives page](#).

You can read an article about the project in the [Community Impact publication](#).



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## **San Marcos Volunteer Workday Scheduled for June 24**

The next San Marcos volunteer workday will be held at Prospect Park is on Saturday June 24 from 7:30-9:30 am. Volunteers will continue removing nonnative invasive species – primarily ligustrum. Tools will be provided, but you are encouraged to bring a water bottle. The group will meet at 1410 Progress St. to start. Parking also available on Columbia Ave. and Wall St. (see map below). [You can RSVP 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.

## **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](http://www.eahcprenewal.org).