



EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - Jan.-Feb. 2025



Stretch Run

EAHCP permittees entering busy 15 months to complete a federal permit renewal application - Ed Oborny, left, and Lucas Bare near the San Marcos River.

With the NCAA's Final Four basketball tournament coming to San Antonio in April, college teams across the country are preparing for their stretch run toward an opportunity to play for a national championship in the Alamo City. And even if you don't have an alma mater in the tournament and are just a fan of the March Madness hoopla, you can't help but get caught up in that type of electric atmosphere. Outside of sports, intense stretch runs happen for major companies, small businesses, and even individuals reaching for new personal bests.

Stretch Run - Continued



Roland Ruiz (right), EAA General Manager and Chair of the 2025 Implementing Committee for the EAHCP, discusses presentations at the February IC Meeting.

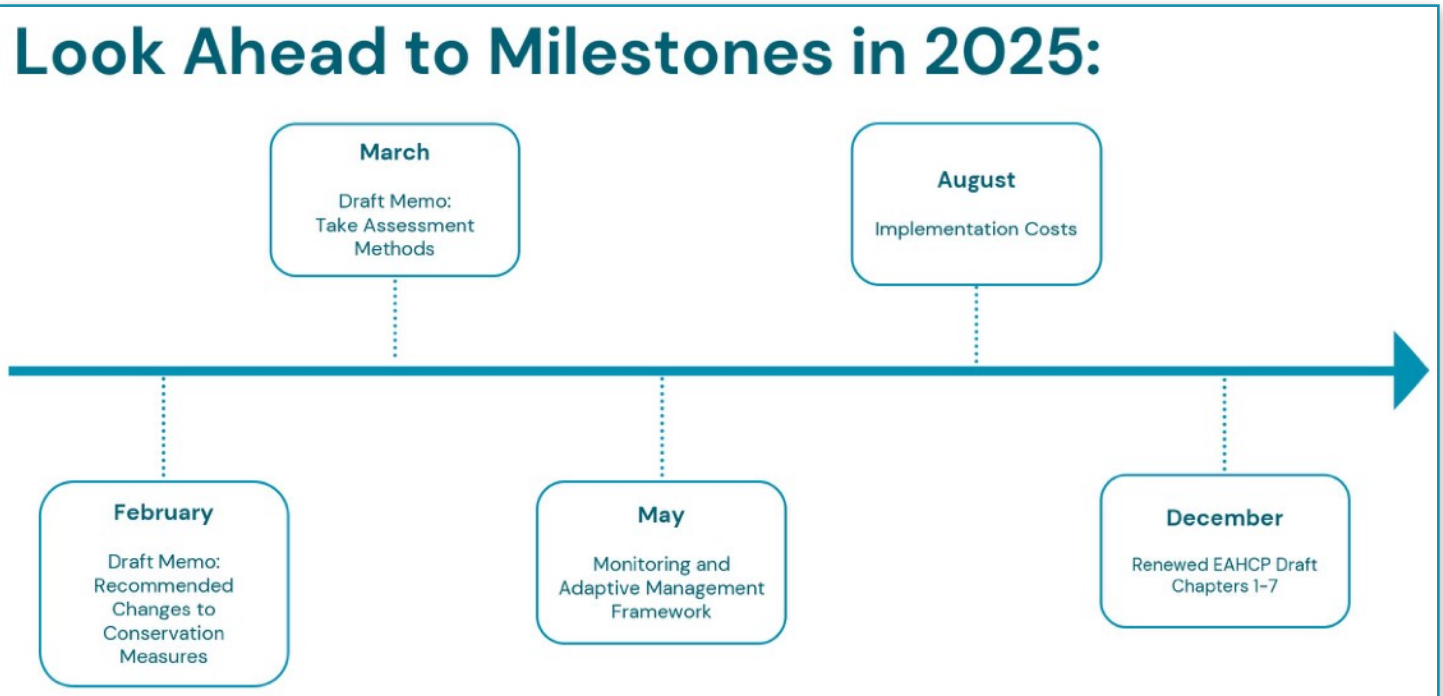
This year, the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) permittees will start a crucial leg of their federal permit application renewal process. And those involved in making it happen know that 2025 will require extreme focus to successfully cross the new permit application's finish line.

"We are expecting to submit an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) application to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in mid-2026," said Lucas Bare, the application renewal project's lead consultant with the firm

ICF. "This year, we have some technical memos to wrap up and then we will compile that huge amount of data and committee input and write the official permit application. Because there will still be several review and comment opportunities for the permittees toward the end of 2025, the next eight to 10 months will be a bit intense."

The USFWS is responsible for implementing the Endangered Species Act. And since there are endangered species living in the Edwards Aquifer ecosystem and because there are multiple users of the Edwards Aquifer, the region needed to have an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) to continue drawing the large amounts of water from the aquifer over time. That first ITP was issued in 2013 and will be effective until March 2028. The ITP renewal application will be submitted well in advance of the existing ITP's expiration date to allow for the USFWS to review the application and conduct its own National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

"This entire process began three years ago with a series of four public input sessions covering various aspects of permit requirements we knew we needed to address in the updated permit application," Bare explained. "This region has a tremendous track record of public involvement that goes back decades and so we wanted to build on that tradition of transparency. The information gathered through the "Listen and Learn" series informed the changes that we are considering for the permit renewal, including changes to biological goals and objectives. Subcommittees have also been formed to provide key inputs to important components of the program, like the conservation measures subcommittee that convened last year. The good news is that the permittees have learned a great deal about the Edwards Aquifer endangered species during the current permit period, what habitat conservation measures work, and which ones could be amended going forward."

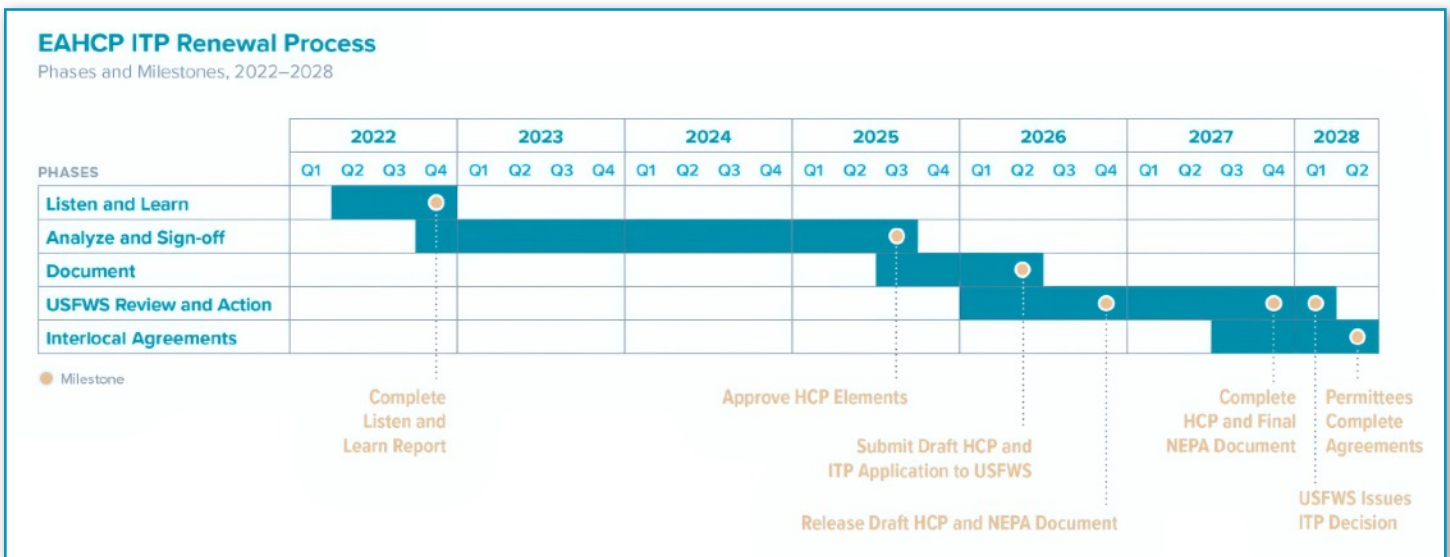


Ed Oborny, a principal for the EAHCP contractor BIO-WEST, drew on his extensive tenure in Edwards Aquifer studies to reflect, “The collected research data for the Edwards Aquifer goes back a few decades, but even in the last few years, there have been quite a few lessons learned that will help guide committees and permit application writers. For example, we’ve really refined our approach to removing non-native vegetation, restoring native aquatic vegetation and then monitoring the new plantings. We’ve also learned a great deal about operating the flow-split system in New Braunfels that provides various amounts of water to endangered species and their habitats, especially in low-flow situations. And, as mentioned, the past few years, flows in the Comal River and San Marcos River have been very low. So while that’s a mixed blessing, we have been able to use those few years’ data to really fine tune our species “take” analysis. The interesting piece of this is even though many of us have been working on this system for many years, the natural environment continues to inform us about how it can stay alive and even thrive in varying conditions.”

Of the four phases outlined for the six-year project, the second phase called Analyze and Sign-Off is expected to wrap up in the next six months or so. Then phase three which consists of document writing, review, and approval will happen throughout 2025 with a final draft expected in early 2026. The final phase will consist of working with the USFWS through its NEPA requirements.

“In the next few months, we will be wrapping up three important memos...take assessment methods, conservation measures, and monitoring and adaptive management,” Bare iterated. “We have already started writing some of the early chapters of the new habitat conservation plan, but the bulk of the new application consisting of seven chapters is still to be developed. We plan to have those completed by the end of the year. Once that work is finished, we will have a final draft ready for public review and comments. The final application document to be submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service should be ready by the middle of next year.”

Stretch Run - Continued



Bare commented that there have been aspects of the new HCP where consensus has been easily reached. But, as is the case with any planning process that includes multiple permittees or stakeholders, there are still some compromises to be reached over the coming months.

“As the permittees begin to reach consensus on those outstanding issues, we will begin writing the final chapters,” Bare noted. “Once the chapters are finished, there will be another round of comments, to include thoughts from the US Fish and Wildlife Service staff. Ultimately, we have to work with the actual permittees in finalizing the application because they will be the ones responsible for carrying out every program in the document, which are all designed to protect endangered species and their habitats. But the opportunity for public review and comment doesn’t stop there because, as we’ve discussed, the USFWS has its NEPA process to go through, which includes a public comment period.”

Bare was upbeat about this HCP’s renewal process as he observed all of the stakeholders are passionate and engaged due to the opportunity they see not only to protect the species but also their communities where these natural resources reside.

Oborny concluded by noting that sometimes it is good to look back and see where you’ve come from. “In my opinion, the implementation of this current HCP has been a huge success. We have witnessed the existing conservation measures work under drought conditions and low flows in the rivers and springs. So, even though we’re closing in on some project deadlines, there are many reasons to be optimistic about successfully achieving a new 30-year EAHCIP Incidental Take Permit renewal.”



EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

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

Regional Upcoming Events.

40th Annual Great Texas River Cleanup, Saturday, March 1 at 9AM

Annual San Marcos River Clean Up targeting litter within and around the San Marcos River and its major tributaries. Starts at 9 AM and at various locations that are assigned when you register online. More information on the [CoSM website here](#), [Register here](#).

COSM Riverfront and Eastside Parks Master Plan Open House, Thursday, March 27

San Marcos Parks and Recreation Department will host multiple Public Open House meetings for community members to provide input on the Eastside Regional Park Plan and the San Marcos Riverfront Parks Plan. The Eastside Regional Park Plan will guide decision making for future development of the former Quail Creek Golf Course property. The Riverfront Parks Plan contains several actions that are identified within the 2019 Parks Master Plan and will provide a more detailed and focused study on the Riverfront Parks area. A Spanish speaker will be present at each public meeting.

Info: Thursday, March 27, 5:30-8:30 PM, Dunbar Recreation Center, [more details here](#).

EDTalks 2025, Friday, March 28

Edwards Aquifer Authority and Southwest Research Institute are hosting EDTalks 2025 in San Antonio on March 28th. Six speakers will cover topics ranging from the water quality and quantity drivers for nature-based solutions to observations of how land surface and groundwater systems interact and examples of specific land management techniques, applications, and results. Registration is now open and includes lunch, a walking tour of savanna restoration at Hardberger Park, and a social networking hour sponsored by SwRI.

Info: \$30, Friday, March 28, 9 AM – 5:30 PM, 8400 NW Military Hwy, San Antonio, [registration here](#).

Texas Freshwater Mussel and Inland Fish Workshop, May 19-23 at TXST

The Texas Freshwater Mussel and Inland Fish Workshop will be held at Texas State University May 19-23, 2025. This workshop and continuing education course is designed to provide up-to-date information on Texas fish and mussel identification, taxonomy, and ecology for agency personnel, consultants, NGO staff, educators, students, or other interested parties. It will include a two-day freshwater mussel identification, ecology, and sampling workshop hosted by Dr. Charles Randklev and colleagues from Texas A&M University, and two days of instruction on inland fish identification and ecology led by Dr. Timothy Bonner, Brad Littrell, and colleagues from Texas State University. The workshop will include both lecture and laboratory settings to get hands-on experience in identification of Texas fishes and mussels. Additionally, an optional field day will be held on Friday May 23 to give participants a chance to implement a variety of common fish and mussel sampling techniques (including electrofishing) and practice their identification skills on live specimens within the Guadalupe River basin.

The course will provide continuing education credits through Texas State University's Continuing Education Department. Cost is \$700/person for the classroom/lab portion, plus \$125 for the optional field excursion. The course will run from approximately 8:00 to 5:00 each day, and light snacks and coffee will be provided in the mornings during the classroom portion. Lunch and lodging are not included. Due to lab size restrictions, capacity is limited to a maximum of 50 participants, so register early to ensure yourself a spot. Registration here: [Texas Fish & Mussel Identification : The Office of Distance and Extended Learning](#) : Texas State University (txst.edu)

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EAHCP Meeting Calendar for 2025

Here is the EAHCP meeting calendar for 2025. All meetings will be held in person and can be joined online as well.

EAHCP 2025 Committee Meeting Calendar:

2025 EAHCP Committee Meeting Calendar			
Committee	Date	Time	Location
Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committee	February 6	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa – San Marcos
Science Committee	February 26	9:00 AM	STAR Park 3055 Hunter Road San Marcos, TX
Implementing Committee	March 27	10:00 AM	EAA
Science Committee	April 17	9:00 AM	STAR Park 3055 Hunter Road San Marcos, TX
Implementing Committee	May 22	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa – San Marcos
Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committee	August 7	10:00 AM	EAA
Science Committee	September 10	9:00 AM	TBD
Implementing Committee	October 9	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa – San Marcos
EAHCP Committees Year End	December 18	10:00 AM	EAA

How to Access EAHCP Committee Documents

[The EAHCP Committee documents are available at this link.](#)