



Balcones Preserves Trail Master Plan Stakeholder Committee Meeting

September 9, 2008 6:00-8:00pm

Waller Creek Center, Austin Water Utility

1. Welcome and Agenda Review – Mike Hockmuller

Mike reviewed the agenda, and Willy shared a few process updates.

- The Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) recently appointed a new representative for the stakeholder process, Mary Ann Neely.
- Willy reminded the group that only one representative from each stakeholder group should be seated at the table at a time. Alternates should sit in chairs behind the table.

2. Takeaways from August 26th Meeting – All

At the August 26th meeting, guest panelists discussed trail planning in sensitive areas.

Stakeholder Comments about August 26th Meeting

- *Walt Dabney and Trey Cooksey emphasized that Texas really needs more trails. We need to pay attention to proper design in trail planning and be aware of EMS and law enforcement plans. Walt and Trey also said that volunteers have helped them achieve success in managing their huge acreage and reminded us not to get bogged down with trying to use existing roads and/or trails because these may not be sustainable.*
- *We need to be aware of threats to Jollyville Plateau salamander from the chytrid fungus and remember that shoes and tires can spread it.*
- *Oak wilt causes habitat loss. We need to educate people and be observant of the protocols of dealing with oak wilt.*
- *There is a huge difference in planning a trail on paper and making it work in reality. The creation of the trail is an insignificant expense in the grand scheme of things; operation expenses are the significant ones.*
- *We need to be cautious of “loving a trail to death.”*
- *Government Canyon has really experienced the power of volunteers. They were integrated into the fabric of the place and its management. Training and clearly defined roles were a big part of that.*
- *I got the message that even though we sometimes think we should work on legacy trails, this can be dangerous and can get us into trouble.*
- *Walt and Trey’s presentation was great for us because Government Canyon is a very successful place. Our group hasn’t paid much attention to enforcement issues yet. Government Canyon has a huge budget for enforcement.*

- *Walt referred his staffing level of 13 permanent staff members, two law enforcement officers, and 40 volunteers (about 5 or more on any given day). This is a very different level of staffing than we have anywhere on city preserves.*
- *Walt and Trey scared me when they said that our group is not in an enviable position. It made me wonder if the science/research is there to do this? Do we really know what we are doing? We need to proceed very slowly.*
- *Walt said when he looked at our data presentations, this appeared to be the most complex trail planning project he's ever seen.*

- *Walt said we can forget about experimental trail openings. His experience was that once you open a trail to a particular activity, you will never be able to get people out of there.*
- *Dogs poop, and if you don't pick it up, it affects water quality. Also, excrement stays around for a very long time.*

Stakeholder Question

- *Since we ran out of time in the meeting, is there a way we can get additional questions answered? Willy said that while we have written submissions from some of the presenters, they are not formal answers and he wouldn't feel comfortable handing them out. All of the presenters were volunteers and really couldn't have given written answers without getting paid for their time. Mike said we should move forward knowing that we don't have all of the information due to time and resource constraints.*

Mike then asked the group what they should take into consideration for the matrix given the information they learned at the last meeting.

Stakeholder Comments for Matrix Updates

- *Someone had suggested that we consider vireos and warblers as "users", so under the criteria "Does it meet the needs of users?" on the matrix, we need to make sure they are included.*
- *We still need to define "habitat" and know what species we are talking about. The group decided this would include the eight federally listed species, the 27 species of concern, the Jollyville Plateau salamander, and bracted twistflower. (Bracted twistflower is mentioned in the permit and is extremely rare.)*
- *We need to make sure we include protection of cultural resources. Willy said we will need to define this as part of management.*

3. Matrix Update – Mike Hockmuller

Mike said since matrix we've been creating has some trail planning components and some management/implementation components, he pulled out the ones most relevant to trail planning and listed them in a separate handout. He passed out this handout to the stakeholders.

Trail Planning Questions

- Does the terrain support a sustainable trail?
- Does the trail meet the standard for public access?
- Does the trail avoid fragmenting high quality habitat?
- Does the trail avoid or protect karst features?
- Does the trail avoid cave access?

- Does the trail avoid occupied habitat?
- Does the trail address access for infrastructure?
- Do trail access points support the type of use we want and discourage undesirable uses?
- Does the trail support connectivity?
- Does the trail avoid conflicts with ongoing land management activities?
- Does the trail avoid cultural resources?

4. Instructions for Map Exercise – Mike Hockmuller

The original plan for tonight was to begin the mapping exercise with South Lake Austin macrosite, but Charlie proposed an alternate way to begin the trail planning. He presented that idea to the group.

Charlie suggested that the group think about the areas they could possibly put trails rather than plan specific trails at this meeting. Charlie worked on WQPL trail planning with Willy's staff. He said he learned through the process that the group can talk about drawing lines on maps and where trails could go, but the only way to be able to tell if a trail will really be sustainable is to get out on the land. During the WQPL process, some portions of trail were redone 30 times. The trail morphed over time due to sites visits by archeologists, BCP managers, and others. Charlie also noted that a key thing the group needs to keep in mind is that they need a group that is willing to do the work for a trail. He said the group will run into karst features, dense canopy, archeological features, and other constraints later in the process. Tonight they will simply start at the tract level.

The group accepted Charlie's proposal. Mike said stakeholders needed to look at the overview map showing all COA BCP tracts and use the Trail Planning Questions handout to proceed. Willy reminded the group that each stakeholder will interpret what he or she heard and saw over the past few months a little differently. He said we will rely on stakeholders' knowledge and creativity based on what they've learned.

Group Activity Instructions

1. Count off and divide into 3 groups.
2. Review all sites.
3. Determine what sites are
 - In – (have a high potential for trails)
 - Out –(no potential for trails)
 - Maybe – (trails are possible longer-term or group needs more information)
4. Prioritize best candidates for trails.
5. Be prepared to share your results.

Willy asked the group to avoid saying no to tracts they need to know more about because these tracts could become possibilities in the future. He said that during the WQPL process stakeholders categorized “maybe” tracts as “conditionally approved.”

Mike said the group is starting big and going to narrow in later. He also reminded stakeholders that this is a master plan, not an implementation plan. Some opportunities may not come to fruition until 10 or 20 years from now. Mike said at this point, discussing is not deciding.

5. Permit Considerations – Bill Seawell

Anything included in the trail master plan will have to meet the permit test. Bill was asked to give some guidance as the group moves forward with trail planning.

Bill gave the stakeholders a handout, which will be posted to the [Trail Master Planning Process website](#) under Meeting 11. His main talking points are also outlined below.

Bill said it seems the group has really picked up on the significant issues. He also said he appreciates that many of the stakeholders have been at most of the meetings, and that Willy, Mike, and Megan have done a good job supporting the process.

Role of FWS in the Process

1. To participate in the planning process as the agency issuing the permit and responsible for monitoring compliance.
2. To advise the group and the Coordinating Committee on what actions are possible without a Permit amendment.

Things to Consider in Proposing New Trails

1. Reasons to be Careful
 - Total acreage targets for GCW and BCV have not been met in total or in the configuration proposed in the EIS/HCP.
 - Cave acquisition goals have not been met, both in terms of total caves and in many cases, area protected around them.
 - Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge land acquisition has been slow, currently slightly less than half the target acreage.
2. EIS/HCP Considerations
 - The BCCP preserve system is to be managed to permanently conserve and facilitate the recovery of the populations of target endangered species inhabiting western Travis County. This priority objective will govern preserve management activities to improve target species habitat, while protecting preserves against

degradation caused by urbanization of surrounding lands and increased public demand for recreation usage within preserves (p. 2-31).

- The welfare of target species (species of concern) will be the overriding influence on all decisions regarding activities on preserve lands (p. 2-32).
- Decisions about activities within preserves should be made cautiously, so as to meet biological objectives to protect and enhance target species and minimize risk of damage to the habitat (p. 2-32).
- **Public Access.** The preserve system may offer public access and recreational opportunities within the Austin and Travis County area where possible and manageable. Public access may be allowed where and when such access does not threaten the welfare of the target species of concern, which is the overriding goal of the preserve system, nor cause the degradation of soil, vegetation, or water resources (p. 2-36).
- **Biking/Jogging/Hiking.** Unsupervised group access should not be allowed within 100 meters of occupied songbird habitat during the breeding/nesting season, unless such access can be documented to show no apparent degradation to the welfare of the species of concern (p. 2-37).

3. Permit Considerations

- GCW: In conjunction with the managing partners, control human activities to eliminate or mitigate any adverse impacts of human activities to the warbler on these 28,428 acres, for the acreage acquired (p. 5).
- BCV: In conjunction with the managing partners, control human activities to eliminate or mitigate any adverse impacts of human activities to the vireo on these 2,000 acres, for the acreage acquired (p. 5).

4. Amendments

- Substantive amendments include those actions or decisions which affect the scope of mitigation or method of implementation of the BCCP or Permit and require the consent of the USFWS. Major amendments would involve changes in amount of incidental take allowed under the permit, changes in Permit Holders, or changes in the species covered under the permit (p. 2-51).

Stakeholder Question

- *Does USFWS have a position on a closed canopy trail going through occupied habitat?* Bill said that could require a permit amendment.

6. Trail Mapping on North Lake Austin Macrosite – All

The stakeholders began the mapping exercise in the following groups:

<u>Group 1</u>	<u>Group 2</u>	<u>Group 3</u>
Jeb Boyt	Glee Ingram	Gabe Ayson
Sheila Hargis	Judi Ronkartz	Willy Conrad
Sheila Holbrook-White	Scott Rowin	Rose Farmer
Charlie McCabe	David Steed	Gary Rochelle
Rusty Ray	Peter Torgrimson	Bill Seawell

7. Debrief Maps – Mike Hockmuller

Mike asked stakeholders to share comments about the map exercise.

Stakeholder Comments

- *It was interesting from a process standpoint. We weren't very prepared because it was our first time doing this, but conclusions could be drawn using the information we have. For example, one tract was dominated by karst geology so we knew a trail could not be planned there.*
- *It was so refreshing to be able to use our minds to problem-solve. I really enjoyed it.*
- *We found many tracts about which we really need more information.*
- *It would be helpful for groups to have as many maps showing habitat as possible. All stakeholders should bring their maps to the next meeting.*
- *I really enjoyed the process. We had to move quickly and narrow our focus.*
- *It was helpful to have someone in the group who knew all of the tracts.*
- *We didn't take a hard look at the matrix. Instead, each member of our small group shared his or her expectations and we reached a common understanding.*
- *We need to look at what types of information we need for the "maybe" tracts.*

8. Next Steps – Willy Conrad

One member of each small group should send notes from the mapping exercise to [Megan](#) before September 23rd. Megan will compile the notes and distribute them at the next meeting.

Willy encouraged stakeholders to send email to himself, Mike, and Megan with suggestions and/or attend the next logistics meeting. The team would appreciate hearing stakeholders' thoughts and suggestions.

Our next stakeholder meeting is next **Tuesday, September 23rd 6:00-8:00pm** in Waller Creek Center room 104. We will pick up where we left off with the map exercise at the

next meeting. Stakeholders should bring all maps they've acquired at previous trail master plan meetings.

The next logistics meeting is Tuesday, September 16th at 10:30am. The meeting is at the Learning and Research Center, and a link to MapQuest directions is found here:

<<http://www.mapquest.com/maps/2800+Spirit+of+Texas+Dr+Austin+TX+78719-2354>>.