

Wildlands for Water, Wildlife, and People

Climate, Water, Environment,
and Parks Committee

July 30, 2025



Environmental Resource Office (ERO)

- 💧 Wildland Conservation Division
 - Water Quality Protection Lands (WQPL)
 - Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP)
- 💧 Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP)
- 💧 Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend
- 💧 Climate Protection













Ecoregions of Texas

Austin: A biodiversity hotspot



Austin's population has doubled every 20-25 years

	Austin	Austin Metro
1940	87,930	214,603
1960	186,545	301,261
1980	345,890	585,051
2000	656,562	1,249,763
2020	961,855	2,283,371

Austin's Wildlands: A Unique Gift

- 💧 A 30-year, \$250M+ commitment to protecting Austin's unique landscapes
- 💧 A large-scale network of conservation lands that benefit water, wildlife, and people
 - 49,000 acres and growing
- 💧 Managed under goals of two programs:
 - Balcones Canyonlands Preserve
 - Water Quality Protection Lands
- 💧 Intentionally placed with Austin Water to ensure support and stewardship into the future



Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

- ♦ **Goal:** Protect woodland and cave habitat for endangered species & species of concern
- ♦ Provides mitigation for habitat loss from energy, communication and transportation infrastructure
- ♦ Public areas of preserve include some of Austin's favorite places:
 - Barton Creek
 - Mt. Bonnell
 - Bull Creek
- ♦ Helps to protect quality of our water supply in Lake Travis & Lake Austin watersheds



**33,000+ acres
(COA + partners)**

**Habitat
Conservation Plan
sets targets for
size/configuration
of land in each
macrosite**

**Protection of 62
named caves**

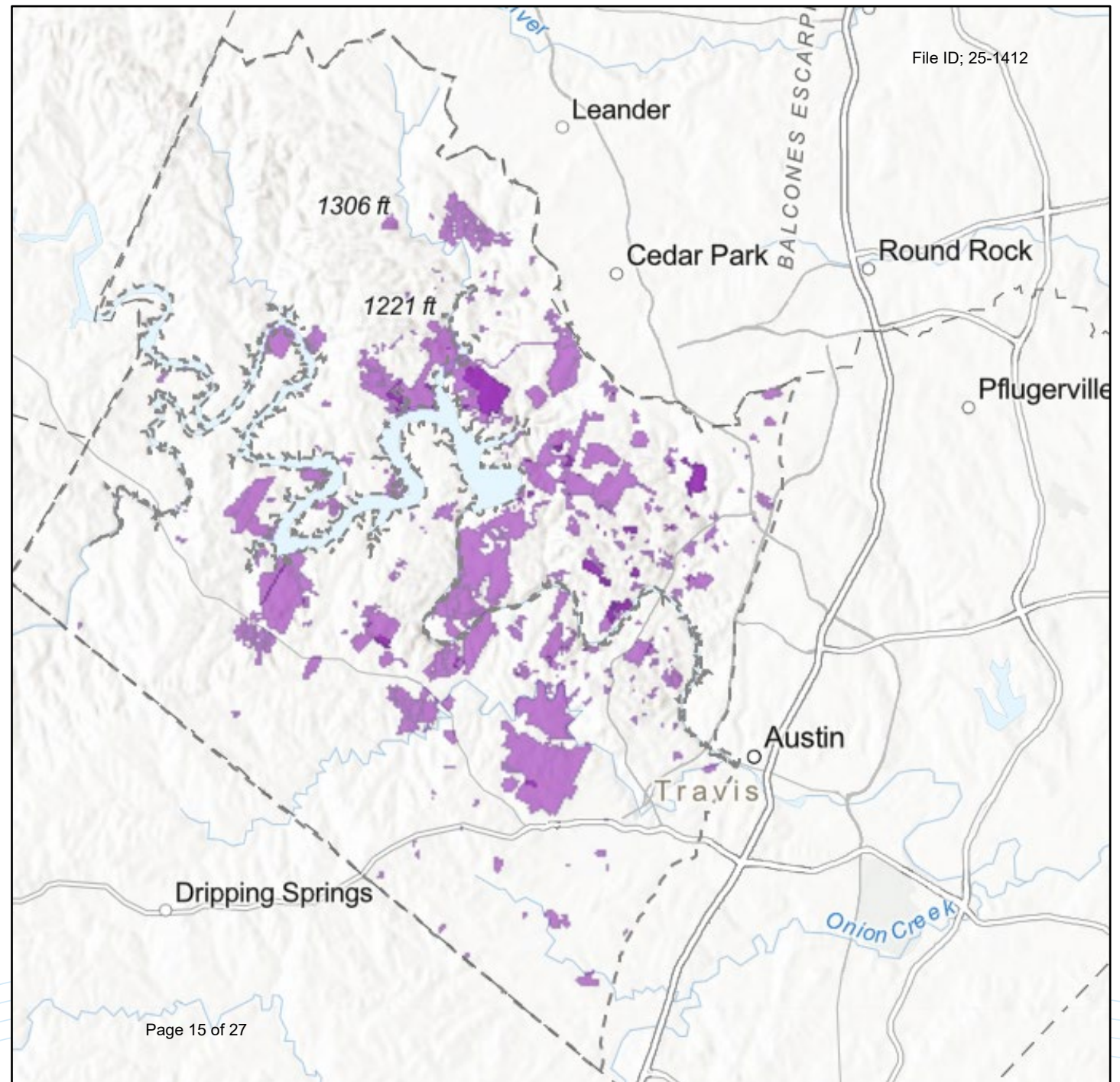


The BCCP facilitates development.

**1,500+ landowners/
developers**

400+ infrastructure projects

12,000+ acres





Water Quality Protection Lands

- **Goal:** Protect and restore native grassland savannas and creeks that provide the main source of water flowing from Barton Springs
- Actively manage land over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the recharge zone to protect groundwater
- Prescribed burn program carefully mimics natural fire cycle using highly trained wildland fire professionals



Image credit: Grace Borangasser

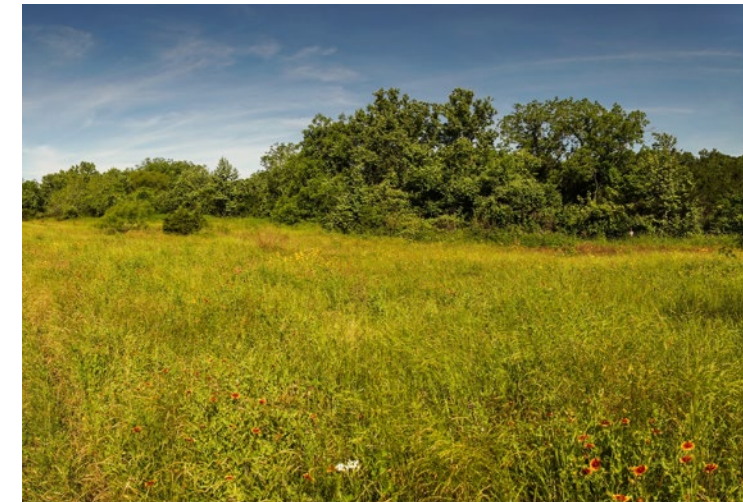


Image credit: Linda Chayra



**Goal of 100,000
acres protected
over Barton Springs
Zone**

12,000+ acres in fee

**22,000+ acres in
conservation
easements**

**Plus regulatory
protection**



Wildland Conservation *Ongoing Management*



Understand

- Intensive monitoring of endangered species and species of concern
- Vegetation transects
- Oak wilt monitoring
- Invasive species monitoring/mapping
- Drought, winter storm impacts
- Live fuel moisture monitoring
- In-house and external research



Protect

- Boundary patrols
- Fence construction and repair
- Facility management
- Invasive species management
- Wildfire fuel mitigation
- Conservation easement reviews



Restore/Enhance

- Grassland and forest restoration
- Prescribed fire
- Seed collection
- Nursery operations
- Oak wilt trenching
- Karst feature restoration
- Restoration of degraded sites



Engage

- Volunteer workdays
- Guided hikes
- Ongoing volunteer programs
- Individual volunteers
- Educational and outreach activities
- Social media
- Engagement with neighbors
- Project notifications
- Partnerships



Looking Forward

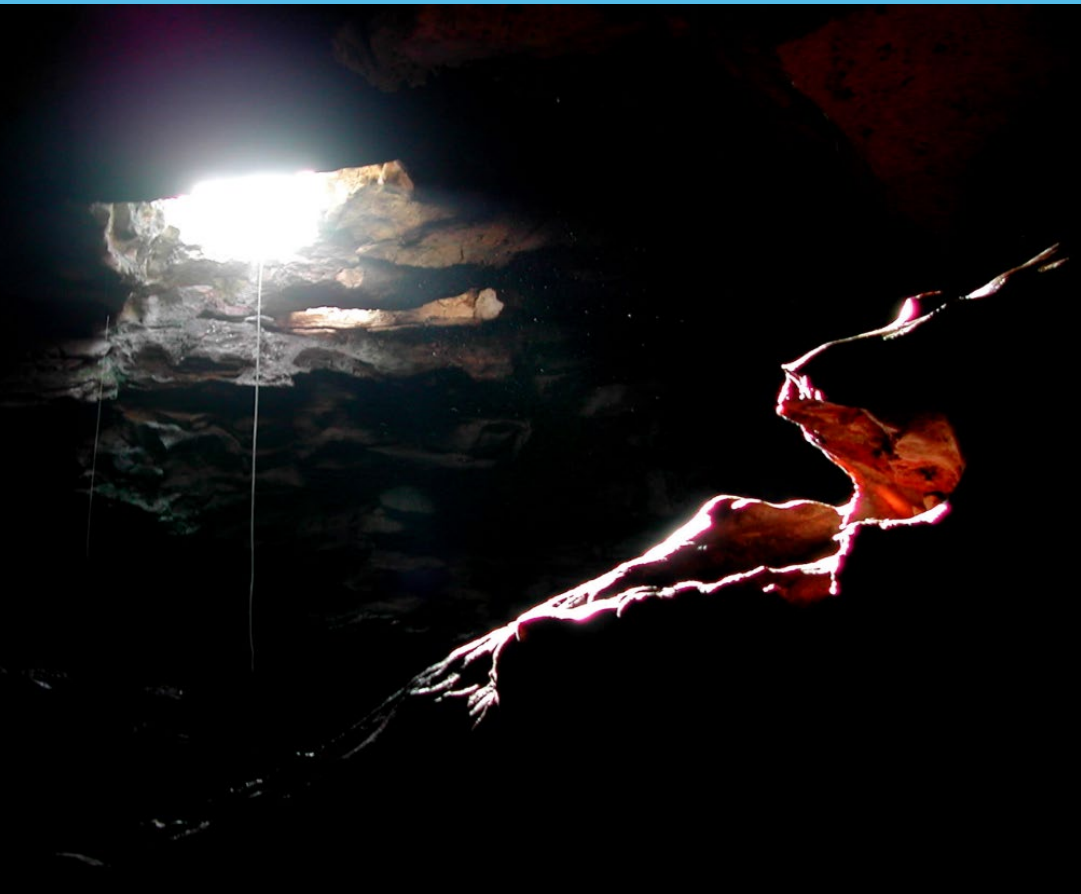


Climate Change & Wildfire



- 💧 The good news: Austin is not California
 - Wetter weather
 - Different vegetation
 - Less wind
- 💧 BUT conditions are changing
 - Drought and winter storm impacts
 - Changing climate
- 💧 Looking forward
 - Quantify changing risks and mitigate where feasible
 - Understand potential ecosystem stressors and support resilient natural systems

BCCP Permit Renewal



- 30-year Incidental Take Permit expires May 2026
- City and County finalizing Interlocal Agreement for permit renewal consulting support
- City and County will submit application for Permit Amendment with Changes
 - City/County take authority will remain in effect through permit renewal process
 - Any proposed amendments will be developed transparently and brought to BCCP Coordinating Committee and elected bodies for full review and public input
- Permit renewal/update will need to meet current USFWS regulations and consider new species
- Protected lands need to remain protected forever (serve as mitigation for development)

Protecting Austin's Special Places



- 💧 Significant achievements have been made, but the work is not complete.
- 💧 Balcones Canyonlands Preserve
 - 10 of 62 required caves remain unprotected
 - Additional acquisitions needed to advance acreage + configuration goals
- 💧 Water Quality Protection Lands
 - 1/3 of the way to 100,000 acres protected
 - Significant development continues to occur in Barton Springs Zone
 - Legislative changes have reduced regulatory protection
- 💧 Opportunities to acquire lands are dwindling while prices continue to increase

Thank you!

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