



News Release

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City of San Antonio and Bexar County Develop Draft Plan to Conserve Nine Federally Listed Species Compatible with Regional Development

Working together, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the City of San Antonio and Bexar County, Texas, have developed a proposed plan to minimize potential impacts of infrastructure and commercial and residential development on nine federally-protected threatened and endangered species and their habitat.

The Service today released the result of that collaboration, the Southern Edwards Plateau draft Habitat Conservation Plan (dHCP), for public review and comment. The draft HCP outlines conservation actions designed to ensure that development occurring in one of the most rapidly growing areas of the country will not jeopardize the survival of the golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, Government Canyon Bat Cave spider, Madla Cave meshweaver, Braken Cave meshweaver, Government Canyon Bat Cave Meshweaver, Helotes mold beetle, and two ground beetle species, each of which has no common name (*Rhadine exilis* and *Rhadine infernalis*).

“The landscape of San Antonio and its surrounding counties provides a home for multiple listed species while also providing clean air and clean water, and driving an economy that supports millions of people. Working together with the City of San Antonio and Bexar County, we’ve developed a plan that will allow wildlife and people to share this amazing landscape in the most effective way possible,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. “The conservation measures proposed in this Habitat Conservation Plan are designed to conserve imperiled species, and help improve the health of the landscape and the benefits it provides to people.”

The Service also released a draft Environmental Impact Statement (dEIS) analyzing the effects of issuing a proposed incidental take permit based on the dHCP. An Incidental Take Permit allows limited “take” of the species (anything from disturbance to injury and mortality) incidental to otherwise lawful activities. The dHCP and associated permit would cover lands within Bexar County and the City of San Antonio’s extra-territorial jurisdictional boundaries.

Bexar County and many of the surrounding counties are within the recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer, the source of drinking water for San Antonio. The aquifer also supports a rich biodiversity of terrestrial and aquatic species, many of which are specially adapted to living entirely underground and occur only in this area of Central Texas. Habitat on the surface supports the nine listed species covered by the dHCP, as well as other native species.

“The Service applauds the City of San Antonio’s longstanding commitment to conserving species,” said Benjamin Tuggle, the Service’s Southwest Regional Director. “The City of San Antonio, in partnership with Bexar County, is once again stepping up through the development of a habitat conservation plan that will protect nine federally listed species while enabling continued economic activity in one of the fastest growing areas in the county. Regional plans like the one being proposed benefit local communities as well as species by maintaining open space, protecting water quality and providing businesses with a streamlined ESA process.”

Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Service has developed a number of tools, including HCPs that provide businesses, landowners and state and local governments with to the ability to continue their activities while ensuring the protection of listed species. Regional Habitat Conservation Plans can cover multiple species, areas and activities thereby providing a streamlined ESA process that minimizes the time and costs associated with developing individual plans.

If the permit is approved, the Service would authorize the incidental take of these federally listed species for a period of 30 years.

Today, the Service is publishing the Notice of Availability of the dHCP, dEIS, and Incidental Take Permit application. The Service encourages the public to review and provide comments on the documents during the 90-day public comment period. Written comments must be received by March 19, 2015. Comments may be submitted in one of the following ways:

- **Electronically:** through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the search box enter FWS-R2-ES-2014-0053, which is the docket number for this notice. Then on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Notices link to locate this document and submit a comment.
- **U.S. Mail to:** Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2014-0053; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Public meetings will be held during the comment period. The exact locations and times for the meeting will be noticed in local newspapers, on the Service’s Austin Ecological Services Office website (<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>) and at <http://www.sephcp.com> at least two weeks prior to each event. For further information on how to obtain or review copies of these documents, or how to provide comments, see the *Federal Register* notice at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/index.html>.

America’s fish, wildlife, and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We’re working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit www.fws.gov, or connect with us through any of these social media channels:



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