

February 2, 2015

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Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance

Request for Coverage

Plan to preserve birds and cave critters in Bexar County found lacking

Nearly five years after scientists and citizens met to devise a plan to protect endangered species in the Southern Edwards Plateau, which includes Bexar County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will hold a public meeting on a very different draft of the plan.

When: Tuesday, February 3rd at 5:pm

Where: Casa Helotes Senior Center, 12070 Leslie Road, Helotes, Texas 78023

An additional hearing will be held on Wednesday, February 4th at the YO Ranch Conference Center, 2033 Sidney Baker, Kerrville, Texas 78028

In 2009 Bexar County received a \$2.3 million dollar grant from the USFWS to draft a Habitat Conservation Plan for the Southern Edwards Plateau region (SEP HCP) – an amount nearly twice what USFWS contributed to the highly successful Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program. This plan, to include Bexar, Bandera, Blanco, Comal, Kendall, Kerr, and Medina counties, would be the basis for allowing development in Bexar County to destroy endangered species habitat within a designated area, allowing for actions that might harm the Golden Cheeked Warbler, Black Cap Vireo (both species of concern for Camp Bullis) and seven karst invertebrate species. In exchange, the HCP would require mitigation through land or easements purchased to protect species habitat off site.

Initial reading of the draft document submitted for approval to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) indicates major discrepancies from the April 2011 recommendations submitted by the Stakeholders Group. Additional discrepancies exist between the recommendations of the Biological Advisory Team and the 2011 draft. All in all, we feel that the USFWS did not get their money's worth from this extremely flawed process and resulting plan that does little, in our opinion, to protect the operations at Camp Bullis or the endangered species.

For example, in November of 2011 the Biological Advisory Team for the SEP HCP approved a recommendation that taking Golden Cheeked Warbler habitat be mitigated at a ratio of 3 acres preserved to each acre taken, with not less than 60% of mitigation occurring within Bexar County or within five miles of Bexar County. The draft HCP submitted by Bexar County reduces required mitigation by 1/3 and allows all mitigation to take place outside of Bexar County. Whatever plan is ultimately approved by USFWS will have a profound influence on future development of our region.

For additional information: <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/12/19/2014-29525/southern-edwards-plateau-environmental-impact-statement-and-habitat-conservation-plan-city-of-san>