



Questions and Answers: Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program draft Habitat Conservation Plan

Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) www.fws.gov/southwest/

For Release: July 13, 2012

Contacts: Adam Zerrenner, (512) 490-0057, ext. 248
Lesli Gray, (972) 569-8588

Q: What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) taking?

A: The Service is announcing the availability of the draft Environmental Impact Statement (dEIS) and the draft Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP) habitat conservation plan (dHCP).

The EARIP has applied for an incidental take permit under section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The requested incidental take permit (ITP) would be in effect for a period of 15 years, if granted, and authorize incidental take of eight federally listed species. The proposed incidental take would occur within the boundaries of the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) for irrigation, industrial, municipal and domestic and livestock uses and the use of the Comal and San Marcos spring and river systems for recreational and other activities. The dEIS evaluates the impacts of, and alternatives to, possible issuance of an ITP.

Q: What is the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program?

A: The Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP) is a stakeholder based effort initiated by the Service in 2006. The goal of the program was to balance the needs of the public with the recovery of eight federally listed species dependent on the springs and river systems associated with the Edwards Aquifer. It is a stakeholder based effort consisting of more than forty groups and individuals from throughout the region, including state agencies, river authorities, utility providers, agricultural and industrial users, environmental and recreation interests and others, working together to balance the needs of the public while contributing to the recovery of the eight federally listed species.

Q: What species would be covered by the EARIP draft Habitat Conservation Plan?

A: The EARIP dHCP proposes to contribute to the recovery of eight listed species, including the endangered fountain darter (*Etheostoma fonticola*), Texas wild rice (*Zizania texana*), San Marcos gambusia (*Gambusia georgei*), Texas blind salamander (*Eurycea rathbuni*), Peck's cave amphipod (*Stygobromus pecki*), Comal Springs dryopid beetle (*Stygoparnus*

comalensis), the Comal Springs riffle beetle (*Heterolemis comalensis*) and the threatened San Marcos salamander (*Eurycea nana*).

Q: What areas are covered in the draft Habitat Conservation Plan?

A: The permit area follows the jurisdictional area of the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA), and includes Bexar, Medina and Uvalde Counties and portions of Atascosa, Caldwell, Comal, Guadalupe and Hays Counties in Texas.

Q: What activities are covered in the draft Habitat Conservation Plan/draft Incidental Take Permit?

A: The Incidental Take Permit, if issued, would cover otherwise lawful activities including the regulation and production of groundwater for irrigation, industrial, municipal, domestic, and livestock purposes; the use of instream flows in the Comal River and San Marcos River for recreational uses; and other operational and maintenance activities that could affect Comal Springs, San Marcos Springs and the associated river systems.

Q: Who is the permitte for the Incidental Take Permit?

A: The proposed Incidental Take Permit will be jointly held by five entities, including the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA), the City of New Braunfels, the City of San Marcos, San Antonio Water Systems (SAWS), and Texas State University at San Marcos.

Q: What is the length of the proposed Incidental Take Permit?

A: The requested Incidental Take Permit would be in effect for a period of 15 years if granted.

Q: How can the public submit information on the proposal?

A: The Service will accept comments received on or before, or postmarked by on or before October 11, 2012 For more information on this proposal, what to comment on, or how to submit comments, see the *Federal Register* notice on our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>.

For further information contact Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758; by telephone (512) 490-0057; or by facsimile (512) 490-0974. If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

Q: Will public hearings/meetings be held on the draft Habitat Conservation Plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement?

A: Seven public meetings will be held in locations throughout south and central Texas, including Corpus Christi, Kerrville, New Braunfels, San Antonio, San Marcos, Uvalde, and Victoria. The exact locations and times for the meeting will be noticed in local newspapers and on the Service's Austin Ecological Services Office website (<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>) at least two weeks prior to each event.