

AGENDA ITEM 33

Consider approving grant funds proposal for Bone Cave Harvestman habitat preserve.

Alan Glen addressed the court concerning the grant application. He stated that this grant application would offset a portion of the cost of the acquisition of the Mayfield Park and to provide a permanent karst preserve on the parkland of 70 to 100 acres. This would include permanent operation and maintenance of the preserve. The grant amount would be \$750,000 with a \$250,000 match from the county.

Moved: Commissioner Hays

Seconded: Commissioner Limmer

Motion: To approve grant funds proposal for the Bone Cave Harvestman habitat preserve.

Vote: 5 - 0

< Attachment >

2002 Section 6 Proposal**RECOVERY LAND ACQUISITION
BONE CAVE HARVESTMAN HABITAT PRESERVE
WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS****Background and Need**

The Bone Cave harvestman (*Texella reyesi*) was originally described in 1992. Prior to that it was considered to be the Bee Creek harvestman (*Texella reddelli*), its nearest relative. It is now distinguished as a separate species. Because the Bone Cave harvestman was considered to be the Bee Creek harvestman at the time the Bee Creek harvestman was listed as endangered on September 12, 1988 (53 Fed. Reg. 36,029), the Bone Cave harvestman was included in the original listing. Subsequently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reviewed the taxonomic change and other available information on this species and determined the Bone Cave harvestman should remain listed as endangered (58 Fed. Reg. 43,818). In 1994, USFWS drafted a recovery plan for the Bone Cave harvestman. The recovery plan for this species calls for the protection of at least three karst fauna areas within each karst fauna region in order to achieve downlisting of the species.

The Bone Cave harvestman is a small troglobitic (cave-dwelling), blind, pale orange, long-legged harvestman which is associated with moist karst habitats. The Bone Cave harvestman spends its entire life underground and is endemic to karst formations (caves) in Williamson and Travis County, Texas. Population estimates for the Bone Cave harvestman are not currently available due to its inaccessibility and secretive habits.

Williamson County is located in the biologically diverse Texas Hill Country. Situated on the Edwards Plateau west of the Balcones Escarpment, Williamson County is home to five endangered species (two birds, including the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo, and three karst invertebrates), more than seventeen other threatened or rare animals and plant species, and a wide diversity of common species. This area is dominated by shallow topsoil overlaying limestone deposits up to 10,000 feet (3,050 meters) deep.

Williamson County's strong economy has led, in part, to a rapidly expanding human population in the area. The growth rate in Williamson County ranks it as one of the five fastest growing counties in the United States. Estimates show a County population increase of approximately 400% by the year 2025. To accommodate this growth, Williamson County recently initiated the Williamson County Multi-Corridor Transportation Plan (the "Road Program"), the County's long-range (2025) transportation plan. The Road Program was established for the purpose of expanding and improving the road and highway system in Williamson County.

Population growth and the need for more roads, however, have put environmental issues at the forefront of the County's transportation plans. The Bone Cave harvestman occurs

in an area that has and is currently undergoing continued urban expansion at a rapid rate. Most of the Bone Cave harvestman's localities occur adjacent to or near developed areas (residential subdivisions, schools, golf courses, roads, commercial and industrial facilities, etc.) or in areas that are proposed for development.

As the natural environment is developed and converted to urban land to accommodate the growing Williamson County population, the surface dynamics that influence the Bone Cave harvestman may be altered. In Williamson County, more than 97% of land-holdings are privately owned. Conservation plans, therefore, need to include private lands as a key component in developing long-term management solutions. Williamson County recognizes that the potential negative effects of an increase in urban development within the County may be significantly minimized by the acquisition and preservation of key karst fauna areas containing the Bone Cave harvestman. Therefore, the County proposes to acquire and set aside, with "Recovery Land Acquisition" grant funds, a Bone Cave harvestman habitat preserve.

Objective

1. To acquire and set aside, in perpetuity, 70-100 acres of karst-preserve land in Williamson County, Texas for the protection and recovery of the Bone Cave harvestman. Williamson County hopes that this proposed karst preserve would help in the eventual recovery and delisting of the Bone Cave harvestman.
2. To include in the karst preserve one or more of the following caves containing the Bone Cave harvestman: Little Demon Cave; Millennium Cave; Mongo Cave; Rock Ridge Cave; Through Trip Cave; Wilco Cave; Wild West Cave.
3. To implement necessary conservation measures and manage the karst preserve by providing protection from threats such as fire ants, habitat destruction, and contaminants.
4. To provide long-term protection of the Bone Cave harvestman at the preserve in question by working cooperatively with private owners and government agencies, including USFWS and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Expected Results and Benefits

Protection of the Bone Cave harvestman as part of the 70 to 100-acre karst preserve should help further the recovery of this species. In keeping with the Bone Cave harvestman recovery plan, the preserve will protect at least one karst fauna area within the Georgetown karst fauna region. In coordination with USFWS, Williamson County expects that the karst preserve will be designed in a configuration that maximizes protection of the Bone Cave harvestman on the property.

Many other species inhabiting the proposed karst preserve may benefit as well. In general, setting aside preserve land will likely aid in the recovery of the Bone Cave

harvestman, help protect other important elements of the karst ecosystem in Williamson County, and possibly prevent the need to list other species in the future.

Approach

Williamson County proposes to acquire with grant funds 70–100 acres of habitat considered key for recovery of the endangered Bone Cave harvestman. These parcels would be protected and monitored in perpetuity as a karst preserve. Conservation measures on the acquired parcels will include, among others, gating significant cave entrances where appropriate, fencing, routine inspections and maintenance work, restrictions on recreational use of some areas (with no public access to the most sensitive sites), vegetation management to control noxious native and non-native plants, and control of fire ants. Williamson County expects that operation and management plans for the karst preserve will comply with the karst invertebrate recovery plan—with the goal of downlisting and eventual recovery of the Bone Cave harvestman—and be implemented in coordination with USFWS.

Because karst ecosystems cannot be recreated once destroyed, the preserve in question would be designed in a way to incorporate the full array of biotic and abiotic factors needed to promote the integrity of the ecosystem on which the Bone Cave harvestman depends. To promote long-term conservation of the Bone Cave harvestman and the ecosystem on which it depends, the preserve would be designed to rely on minimal management rather than frequent human intervention to control threats to the system.

Location

The preserve property to be acquired is out of a tract of approximately 300 acres in southwestern Williamson County, Texas, on what is known as the Mayfield/Nelson Ranch Property. The balance of the tract is intended for passive and active parkland uses. Williamson County expects to coordinate with USFWS in designing the preserve tract and planning the preserve tract's geographic relation to parkland use on the surrounding property. The site is located to the east of County Road 175 (Sam Bass Road), approximately 0.75 miles north of Farm to Market Road 1431 (FM 1431), and approximately 5 miles east of the U.S. Highway 183 and FM 1431 intersection in Cedar Park, Texas.

Estimated Cost

The County proposes to acquire the preserve land in question for \$1,000,000. Williamson County will provide a 25% cost-share or \$250,000 for recovery land acquisition, with the federal government providing, in grant funds, the remaining amount or \$750,000.

The price of land in Williamson County is on the increase. The Texas Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University estimates that current "urban fringe" land values of \$11,750 per acre in Williamson County represent an increase of approximately 300% since 1995.

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Rapid and sustained development in Williamson County will undoubtedly foster further land-value increases in the area. Therefore, acting now to acquire non-federally owned land in Williamson County will be more cost effective than in the future when land values will be even higher.

With "Recovery Land Acquisition" grant money, Williamson County is committed to funding and implementing management of the above Bone Cave harvestman preserve habitat in perpetuity, consistent with the conservation needs of the species.

*approved to apply 5-21-02
John C. Daefler*

AGENDA ITEM 34

Consider approving the exchange of acreage between Williamson County Park Foundation and TxDOT Cedar Park Campus for the Brushy Creek Trail.

Charlie Crossfield addressed the court concerning the proposed exchange of acreage, which will allow TxDOT and Williamson County to obtain property necessary for the highway expansion and the trail expansion.

Moved: **Judge Doerfler**

Seconded: **Commissioner Boatright**

Motion: To approve the exchange of acreage between Williamson County Park Foundation and TxDOT Cedar Park Campus for the Brushy Creek Trail.

Vote: **3 – 0. Commissioner Hays and Commissioner Limmer were absent from the dais.**

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