

# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - January 2022



*Jamie Childers and Scott Storment with ITP renewal flow chart in the background.*

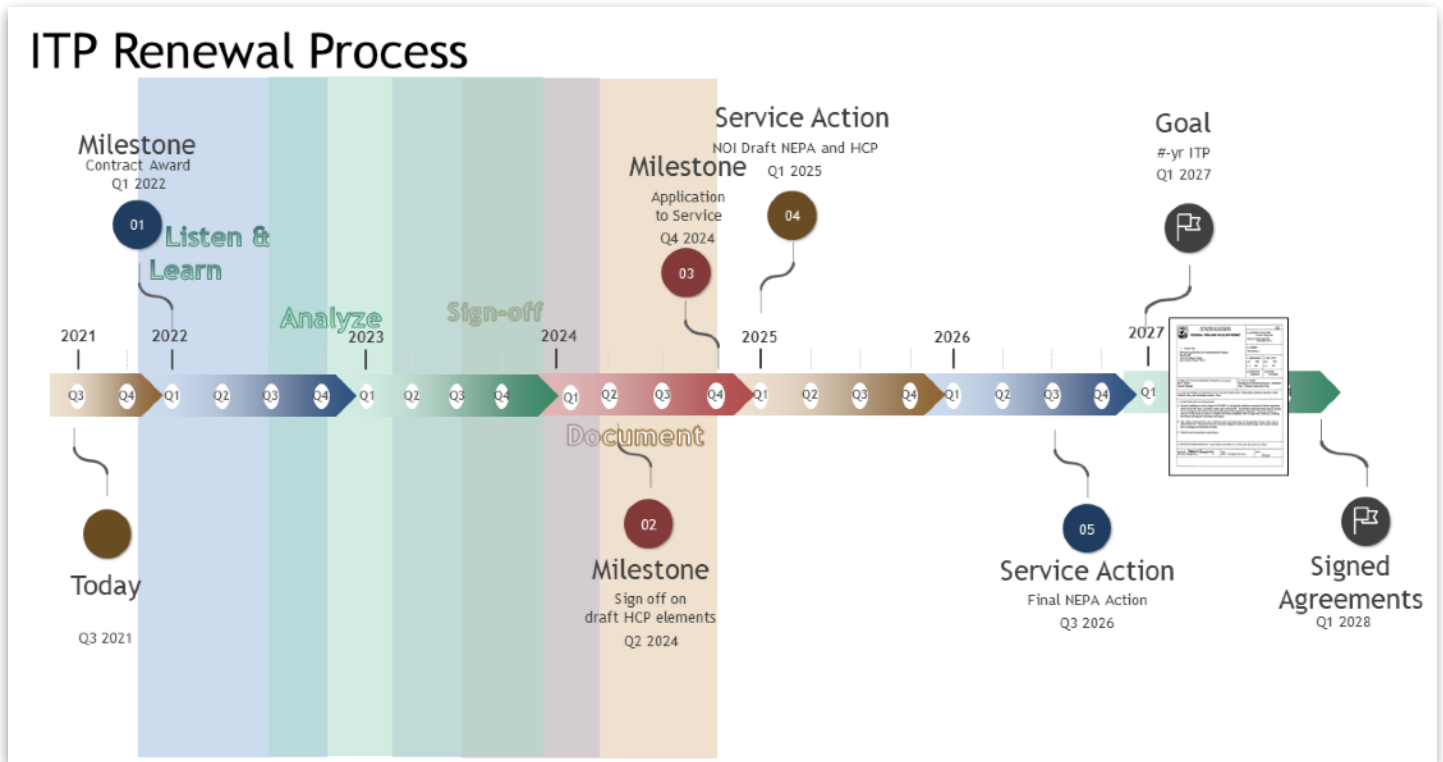
**R**obert Orben, a comedy writer famous for one-liners, once wrote, “Time flies, but it’s up to you to be the navigator.”

That gem would seem to fit in the “words of wisdom” category rather than a comedy routine. But, it aptly describes the actions now being taken by the leadership of the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) regarding the renewal of its federal Incidental Take Permit (ITP), which doesn’t expire until 2028.

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## Time Flies - Continued

“We know that starting a project six or so years in advance might seem to some like we’re way too early to begin working toward our ITP renewal. But once you lay out all of the major milestones we need to accomplish to get there, some might say we’re starting too late,” said EAHCP Program Manager Scott Storment. “Time will pass quickly and we know we must conduct a comprehensive assessment of how our current program is fulfilling the current federal permit and then make some major decisions on the type of permit renewal we will submit to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. So, while we won’t please everyone with this timeline we’ve laid out to get to our destination, we know the work that needs to be done and so we’re comfortable with starting that journey now.”



Most people know that the EAHCP program was put in place to protect the threatened and endangered species and the Edwards Aquifer. Many might not know that the issuance of a federal Incidental Take Permit in this case is driven by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which was signed into law on January 1, 1970. NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of various types of actions before allowing those actions to take place.


The mandate driving NEPA is that it “requires the federal government to use all practicable means to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony.”

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is responsible for implementing the Endangered Species Act. And since there are endangered species living in the Edwards Aquifer ecosystem and because there are multiple users of the Edwards Aquifer, the region needed to have an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) to continue drawing the large amounts of water from the aquifer over time,” said EAHCP Director of Habitat Conservation Administration Jamie Childers. “NEPA requires federal agencies to balance human socio-economic needs with nature’s needs. They start by assessing existing conditions then ask some basic questions such as, if we do nothing, what will happen.”

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## Time Flies - Continued

If we implement a permit to mitigate certain actions, what will happen. The Service then weighs those two options and decides which one is most beneficial to the environment and humans. In the case of the Edwards Aquifer Region, they chose to issue an Incidental Take Permit which gives the region the ability to continue pumping groundwater as long as there are programs in place to protect the endangered species.”



“I think we are in a good place now and ready to move forward toward renewing our federal permit. One thing we do know, time will fly by and I think we’ll look back in 2028 and be glad about starting when we did.”

Scott Storment - EAHCP Program Manager

Storment explained that the first major step in beginning the permit renewal process will be the selection of a consultant. He noted that they are looking for a contractor that has national experience with other HCPs and can help the team assemble the right types and amount of information that the FWS will be looking for. Storment said this will be one of the larger contracts the EAHCP and Edwards Aquifer Authority Board will commit to so the contractor will need to have a wide range of expertise, professional relationships and flexibility in getting this multiyear project completed.

After getting a contractor on board, Storment said there will be four main phases in the renewal process and described them as:

- **Listen and Learn Phase** - a stakeholder involvement process that will run throughout 2022
- **Analyze Phase** - a means to identify need for more data gathering through studies which will start in 2023
- **Sign Off Phase** - a period of time for EAHCP partners to review and ultimately approve the components of the comprehensive permit renewal document
- **Document Phase** - a comprehensive document will be written and submitted to the FWS. Following review of the document, the FWS will decide how to address the EAHCP permit renewal request.

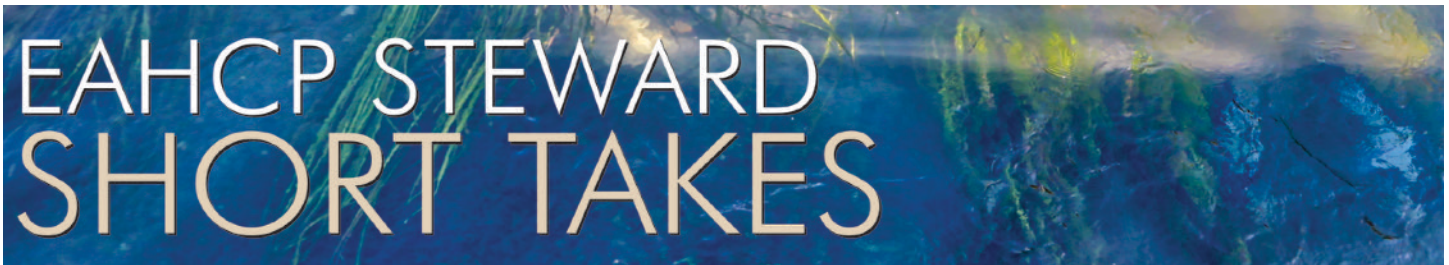
The goal is to have a new EAHCP permit in place by March of 2028. One of the most significant differences from the current permit, however, will be the length of the permit.

## Time Flies - Continued

Childers pointed out that the Listen and Learn series will be designed to build upon the program's current public involvement and cast an even wider net. In addition to the current Stakeholder Committee, they will be looking to invite other groups or individuals who might have some interest or could possibly be affected by the programs that will make up the second ITP. At the four Listen and Learn workshops, the current status of monitoring, research, and conservation measures will be presented and EAHCP staff will look to those interested stakeholders to identify any additional information that they think needs to be considered in developing the formal permit submittal.

"One of the Listen and Learn workshops will be on climate change," Childers noted. "We've heard a lot about this topic at our recent Committee meetings, and with a 30-year permit request, we will want to provide as much science as possible to project how changing climate might impact proposed programs."

Stormont concluded, "There have always been different parties with different interests sharing this one water resource that is the Edwards Aquifer. And just as trust levels improved during the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program public process which started us down this path, I think we all took a major step forward when we began to implement the habitat conservation plan. This is where we started spending citizens' dollars, putting complex programs in place and working together each day to make sure we complied with the federal permit. So, I think we are in a good place now and ready to move forward toward renewing our federal permit. One thing we do know, time will fly by and I think we'll look back in 2028 and be glad we started when we did."



## EAHCP Meeting Schedule for 2022

### IMPLEMENTING COMMITTEE DATES

DATE	COMMITTEE	LOCATON	TIME
August 18, 2022	Implementing	TBD	10:00 AM

### JOINT IMPLEMENTING AND STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE DATES

DATE	COMMITTEE	LOCATON	TIME
March 24, 2022	Joint SH-IC	TBD	10:00 AM
May 19, 2022	Joint SH-IC	TBD	10:00 AM
October 13, 2022	Joint SH-IC	TBD	10:00 AM
December 15, 2022	Joint SH-IC-SC	TBD	10:00 AM

### SCIENCE COMMITTEE DATES

DATE	COMMITTEE	LOCATON	TIME
February 15, 2022	Science	TBD	9:00 AM
April 27, 2022	Science	TBD	9:00 AM
September 14, 2022	Science	TBD	9:00 AM
November 9, 2022	Science	TBD	9:00 AM
December 15, 2022	Joint SH-IC-SC	TBD	10:00 AM

## **Implementing Committee Members for 2022**

The Implementing Committee members for 2022 are:

**Chair: Robert Mace**

Deputy Executive Director – Meadows Center for Water and the Environment  
Texas State University

Alternate: Kimberly Meitzen

**Vice-Chair: Darren Thompson**

Director of Water Resources  
San Antonio Water System

Alternate: Donovan Burton

**Secretary: Tom Taggart**

City of San Marcos

Alternate: Melani Howard

**Mark Enders**

Watershed Program Manager

City of New Braunfels

Alternate: Phillip Quast

**Roland Ruiz**

General Manager

Edwards Aquifer Authority

Alternate: Brock Curry

**Chad Norris**

Deputy Executive Manager of Environmental Science and Community Affairs

Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority

Alternate: Nathan Pence