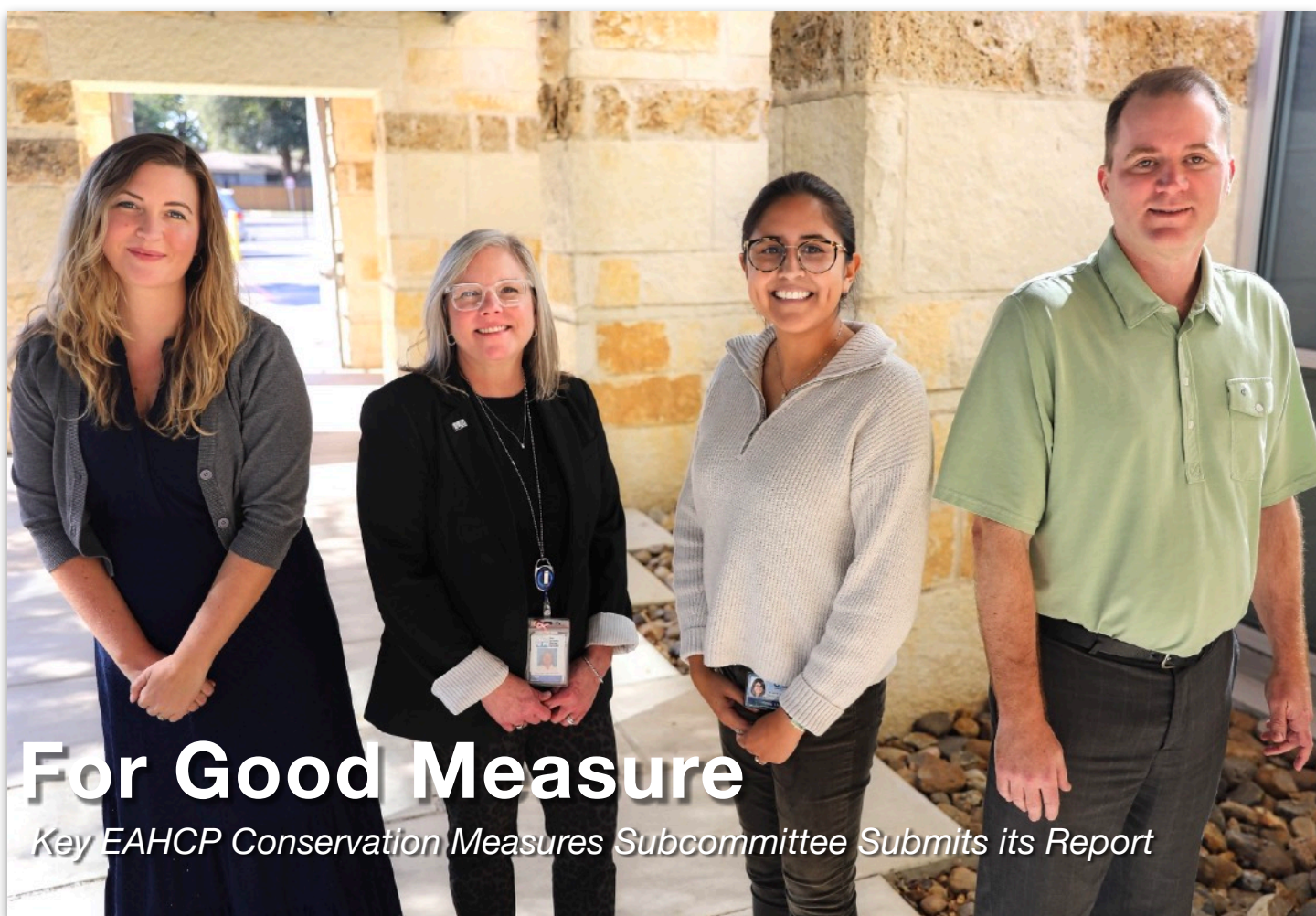




EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - Nov.-Dec. 2024



The Conservation Measures detailed in the current Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) are the keys to maintaining the Edwards Aquifer Region's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Incidental Take Permit. Without that permit, great uncertainty would descend on all permittees and the region could find itself struggling to ensure the long-term viability of the Edwards Aquifer, which is still the region's central supply of water. Because the EAHCP's Incidental Take Permit expires in 2028, the current Conservation Measures were thoroughly evaluated by a subcommittee of permittees and stakeholders to provide insights on how these critical protection measures can be implemented in the next EAHCP.

For Good Measure - Continued

“While everyone on the subcommittee knew the importance of the conservation measures that protect the endangered species, we also went into this process having more than 10 solid years of success in implementing these programs,” said Marc Friberg, EAA Deputy General Manager and the EAA representative on the Conservation Measures Subcommittee. “One of our primary goals for this subcommittee’s work was to find some flexibility in how we maintain and improve our existing conservation measures. And I think we achieved that through this series of very focused meetings.”

Friberg explained that the purpose of the springflow protection measures is to reduce pumping from the aquifer during severe droughts to keep the Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs flowing. That fresh water sustains the endangered species and their habitats. It is the “how you go about” reducing pumping while protecting those who heavily rely on pumping Edwards Aquifer water that is the delicate balance the conservation measures need to achieve.

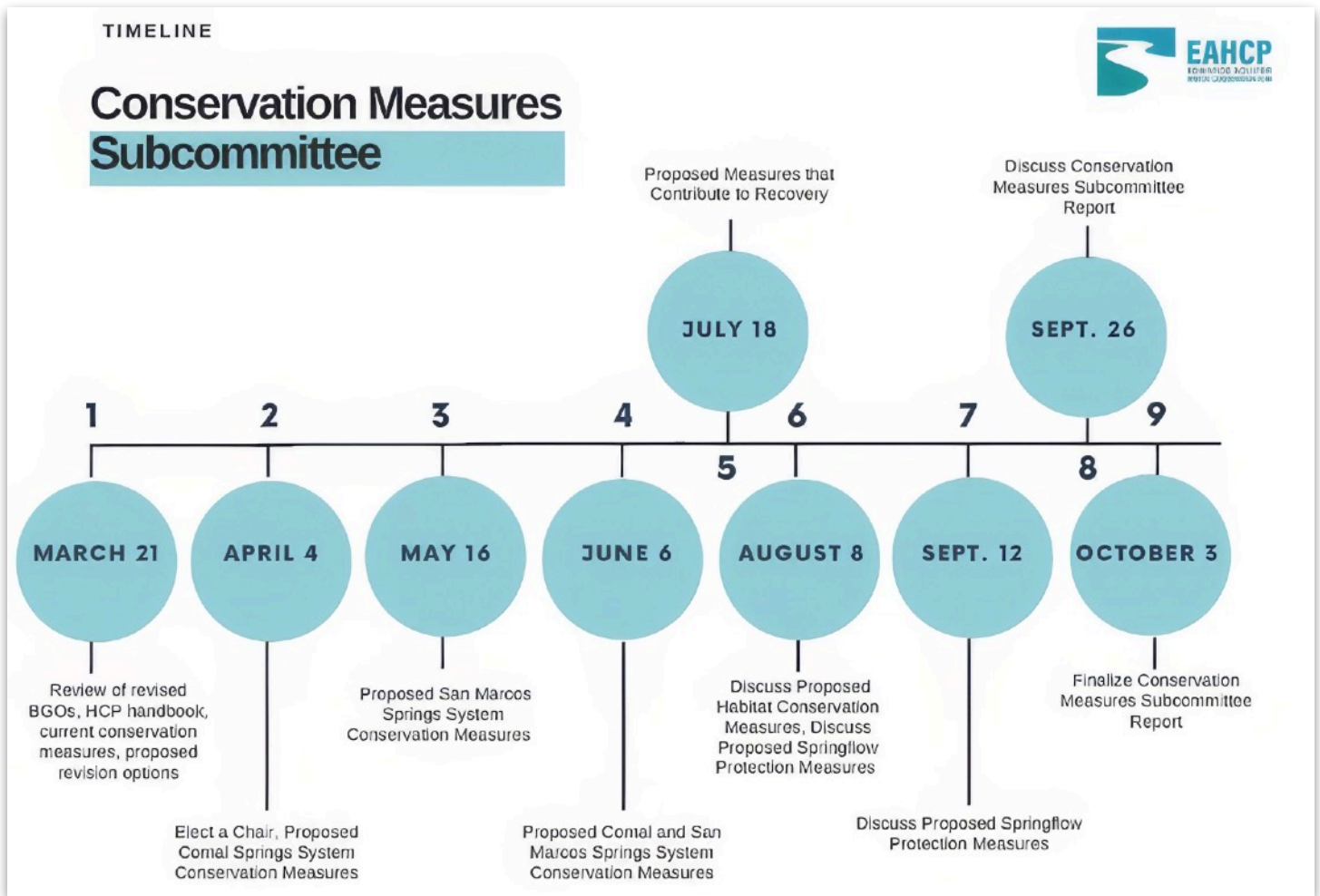
According to the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Handbook, the conservation measures describe the specific actions that permittees will implement to achieve biological objectives and support the overall goals of the HCP consistent with applicable state and federal requirements. Given that mission, the Conservation Measures Subcommittee’s charge stated they would:

- Review the HCP Handbook as it pertains to Conservation Measure purpose and structure.
- Receive an overview of the Biological Goals and Biological Objectives Subcommittee recommendations.
- Use the best available science and knowledge of the current HCP experience to determine the needed Conservation Measures.
- Review the current EAHCP Conservation Measures (EAHCP § 5.0).
- Consider the effects of climate change and other potential variables relative to the proposed HCP period.
- Review and provide feedback on draft Conservation Measures developed and provided by EAHCP staff.
- Finalize and approve Conservation Measure recommendations to be provided to the EAHCP Implementing Committee before submission to the EAHCP Permit Renewal contractor (ICF).



EAHCP Conservation Measures help protect the endangered Texas wild-rice habitat.

For Good Measure - Continued



“Anytime you go through a committee process like this, you have the opportunity to review current programs so that you might streamline them in the future,” said Olivia Lopez, HCP Program Coordinator, who was responsible for co-organizing the subcommittee’s work. “One of the main accomplishments included the reduction of redundant tasks by combining like activities and standardizing similar habitat restoration. For example, both the City of New Braunfels, City of San Marcos and Texas State University were doing riparian restoration, gardening of submerged aquatic vegetation, non-native removals and other protection measures. However, the measures have very different titles and descriptions which has complicated some aspects of implementation. To remedy those issues, we standardized the categories and made sure the descriptive wording was relatively consistent. In one instance we combined 10 specific tasks regarding recreation on the San Marcos River to Aquatic Recreation Management”, said Kristina Tolman, Senior HCP Coordinator.

Lopez noted that, ultimately, the Subcommittee recommended reorganizing the conservation measures into the following five major categories:

- Springflow Protection
- Habitat Protection
- Refugia
- Measures that Contribute to Recovery

“These new categories better reflect the focus of each group of measures, align more closely with the overall conservation strategy, and are more concise and cohesive in achieving the Biological Goals and Objectives of the EAHCP,” Lopez concluded.

For Good Measure - Continued

Here are the overarching goals for each conservation measure as recommended by the subcommittee.

Springflow Protection Measures are activities implemented to minimize flow impacts to the Covered Species associated with permitted groundwater pumping from the Edwards Aquifer.

The Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs systems habitat conservation measures, also known as Habitat Protection Measures, are activities implemented within the spring runs, lakes, rivers, and adjacent riparian zones of the springs systems to minimize the impacts from Covered Activities and enhance the habitat of the Covered Species.

The Refugia Measure describes the off-site refugia that house, research, and maintain populations of the Covered Species to support re-establishment in the wild if wild populations are extirpated due to catastrophic events such as a chemical spill or exceptional drought.

Measures that Contribute to Recovery are measures that go beyond minimum mitigation requirements to contribute to the likelihood of down-listing (reclassification of endangered to threatened) or delisting of the listed Covered Species.

While there is a final report from the Conservation Measures Subcommittee, there are some outstanding issues, referred to in the report as Comments for Consideration, that still need discussion and resolution. Friberg pointed out that the subcommittee realized that those topics were not directly pertinent to the Conservation Measures Report recommendations and so they were willing to set them aside for later considerations.

“One of the points of emphasis for the subcommittee was making sure all members had ample opportunities to review and comment throughout the process,” Lopez said. “For example, over the course of our meetings, there were seven different review periods for members to edit the report and provide feedback. Additionally, we all wanted to make sure that the whole process was transparent for anyone interested in following along. So, we posted all of the meeting recordings and agendas on our website. We’ve had nationally recognized success in implementing the current EAHCP, but there is always room for improvements and that’s what we’re diligently and collaboratively working on now.”

Members of the Conservation Measures Subcommittee:

- Subcommittee Chair: San Antonio Water System: Represented by Linda Bevis
- Texas State University: Represented by Kimberly Meitzen
- City of San Marcos: Represented by Mark Enders
- City of New Braunfels: Represented by Phillip Quast
- Edwards Aquifer Authority: Represented by Marc Friberg
- Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority: Represented by Daniel Large
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Bexar County Interest): Kerim Jacaman
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Recreational Interest): Melani Howard
- EAHCP Stakeholder Committee Member (Agricultural Interest): Adam Yablonski



EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

[Listen to this month's EAHCP Steward Podcast by clicking here.](#)

EAHCP Meeting Calendar for 2025

Here is the EAHCP meeting calendar for 2025. All meetings will be held in person and can be joined online as well.

EAHCP 2025 Committee Meeting Calendar:

| 2025 EAHCP Committee Meeting Calendar | | | |
|--|--------------|----------|--|
| Committee | Date | Time | Location |
| Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committee | February 6 | 10:00 AM | Pauline Espinosa – San Marcos |
| Science Committee | February 26 | 9:00 AM | STAR Park 3055 Hunter Road San Marcos, TX |
| Implementing Committee | March 27 | 10:00 AM | EAA |
| Science Committee | April 17 | 9:00 AM | STAR Park 3055 Hunter Road San Marcos, TX |
| Implementing Committee | May 22 | 10:00 AM | Pauline Espinosa – San Marcos |
| Joint Stakeholder and Implementing Committee | August 7 | 10:00 AM | EAA |
| Science Committee | September 10 | 9:00 AM | TBD |
| Implementing Committee | October 9 | 10:00 AM | Pauline Espinosa – San Marcos |
| EAHCP Committees Year End | December 18 | 10:00 AM | EAA |

How to Access EAHCP Committee Documents

[The EAHCP Committee documents are available at this link.](#)