



# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - January 2021



## “M” Keeps Endangered Species in Good Condition

*Melani Howard at the San Marcos Discovery Center*

This is South Central Texas and people who have lived here awhile understand the weather roller coaster we all ride each year. In addition to significant varying degrees of temperatures experienced through the four seasons, this part of Texas also can encounter feast or famine when it comes to rainfall. It's because of those dry spells that Condition M was included in the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan's (EAHCP) Incidental Take Permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Condition M?

Yes, you would have to be a bit of an insider to know what Condition M is, but those who have to follow its guidelines when triggered have studied it, know how to implement its provisions, but also have some thoughts about it going forward. Melani Howard, who manages the City of San Marcos' EAHCP program, has had to implement Condition M three times. The most recent occurrence began in December.

## Condition M - Continued

“Well, ‘Condition M’ does sound a bit exotic, but it is a fairly simple set of rules that states when the San Marcos springflows decline to 120 cubic feet per second (cfs), our field research, construction activities and other types of work in the San Marcos River near the springs must either stop or be curtailed. That is because low flows in the river caused by diminished springflows create a greater potential for harming the endangered Texas wild-rice stands and the endangered fountain darter habitat. The interesting thing to note now is that since the first time we implemented Condition M in 2014, we have learned a great deal about the San Marcos Springs and River ecosystem. That knowledge gives us a lot more comfort now about how Texas wild-rice will respond to dry conditions than what we knew the first time around.”



State Scientific Area cordoning on the San Marcos River during Condition M provision implementation.

Condition M does apply to the Comal River when spring flows reach 130 cfs. However, due to how recharge affects the Comal Springs and the San Marcos Springs differently, Condition M did not trigger in New Braunfels in 2020.

The protection measure is closely monitored by EAHCP manager to watch for springflows to consistently stay above the 120 cfs trigger. For example, recent rainfall created a short period of springflow readings above 120 cfs, but then flows quickly decreased to below the threshold so Condition M remained in effect. Fundamentally, the removal of work restrictions in the San Marcos River due to Condition M are determined on a case-by case basis.

“When Condition M is triggered, we stop planting native aquatic plants as well as terrestrial native plants in the riparian areas near the river banks,” Howard explained. “We also have a very active program of removing invasive aquatic plants, like hydrilla, from the river. But, to do that, we have people in the river where

## Condition M - Continued

Texas wild-rice lives. That kind of foot traffic, so to speak, can harm Texas wild-rice plants and other endangered species so that type of work is temporarily curtailed.”

While many of the ITP conditions are not flexible, Howard noted that the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service did make some allowances to the EAHCP when it came to litter removal and vegetation mat control. The first set of rules limited all aquatic restoration work when Condition M is in place. However, EAHCP managers were able to demonstrate that the accumulation of floating mats of vegetation increased during low flows and actually created problems for the endangered species, such as reduced water velocity and blocking sunlight, if not removed. The managing of litter through snorkeling was prohibited before it was shown that the benefits of that effort outweighed the detrimental effects of not continuing that work.



Because the San Marcos River is a heavily recreated area, there are additional guidelines in Condition M about how the “State Scientific Area” is managed during low-flow periods. In 2012, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department designated a two-mile stretch of the San Marcos River from the Spring Lake Dam to the area near the San Marcos Water Treatment Plant as a State Scientific Area in order to protect Texas wild-rice. Additionally, the state rule allowed the restriction of certain sections of the river associated with Texas wild-rice stands to be temporarily designated as off-limits when the river’s flow falls below 120 cfs. Those areas are clearly marked with booms, buoys and signage at river access points so the public knows to stay out of the marked parts of the river.

This year, though, because Condition M triggered during December when there was reduced recreation and pandemic-related closures, the EAHCP decided not to install the restricted area markers because that work could cause unnecessary disturbance to the species.

“When Condition M was created, we were at the beginning of implementing the EAHCP and really had a lot of research to do and a lot to learn from those studies. We were also in the midst of a fairly serious drought,” Howard commented. “But, over the past few years, we have come to see how very resilient Texas wild-rice is and what the benefits can be to endangered species habitat by replacing nonnative plants with natives. In fact, we could find that EAHCP work is actually more beneficial for Texas wild-rice if it is continued during low flows.”

Who knows, we might be able to show that much of the provision is not needed because of all of the other programs we have in place to protect endangered species and habitats. Until then, we will diligently follow the plans in place while we’re learning.”



# EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

## Thank You Lindsay Campbell



For the past four years, Dr. Lindsay Campbell has headed up the EAHCP's refugia facility in San Marcos. Recently, she announced she would be leaving, so the EAHCP team wants to wish her the very best.

She was always very accommodating to the *EAHCP Steward* as we sought to tell the story about the refugia and its importance to the habitat conservation plan. Her welcoming attitude and professional manner will surely be missed by the team. This is one of our favorite quotes from the various stories she helped us put together.

"I'm a researcher at heart and always look forward to being in the field and doing the hands on work that is essential to overall understanding of these unique species," Campbell said. "We learn things each day and then have to assemble those bits of information into sound science that we can pass on to other researchers and the EAHCP team. That's truly exciting and a story well worth telling to others around the country."

## New EAHCP Committee Leaders for 2021

With the new year comes new leadership changes for the EAHCP. Here are the officers who will be leading the teams this year.

Implementing Committee Chair - Mark Enders, City of New Braunfels

Implementing Committee Vice-Chair - Robert Mace, Texas State University

Implementing Committee Secretary - Darren Thompson, San Antonio Water System

Stakeholder Committee Chair - Doris Cooksey, CPS Energy

Stakeholder Committee Vice-Chair - Myron Hess, Texas Living Waters Project

Stakeholder Committee Secretary - Patrick Shriver, San Antonio Water System

## Mark Your Calendars - EAHCP Meetings for 2021

If you would like to get a head start on the various EAHCP meetings for the year, you can click this link to view the 2021 calendar. [www.edwardsaquifer.org/habitat-conservation-plan](http://www.edwardsaquifer.org/habitat-conservation-plan)