



## Questions and Answers: Southern Edwards Plateau (SEP) draft Habitat Conservation Plan

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

**A:** The Service is releasing the Southern Edwards Plateau draft Habitat Conservation Plan (dHCP), for public review and comment. The draft HCP outlines conservation actions designed to ensure that development occurring in one of the most rapidly growing areas of the country will not jeopardize the survival of the golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, Government Canyon Bat Cave spider, Madla Cave meshweaver, Braken Cave meshweaver, Government Canyon Bat Cave Meshweaver, Helotes mold beetle, and two ground beetle species, each of which has no common name (*Rhadine exilis* and *Rhadine infernalis*).

The Service is also releasing a draft Environmental Impact Statement (dEIS) analyzing the effects of issuing a proposed Incidental Take Permit (ITP) based on the dHCP. An Incidental Take Permit allows limited “take” of the species (anything from disturbance to injury and mortality) incidental to otherwise lawful activities. The dHCP and associated permit would cover lands within Bexar County and the City of San Antonio’s extra-territorial jurisdictional (ETJ) boundaries.

The Service encourages the public to review, and comment on, the dEIS and dHCP during the 90-day public comment period being announced today.

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

**A:** Participants requesting coverage for incidental take in the SEP dHCP must occur within the jurisdictions of Bexar County or the City of San Antonio, including the City’s current and future ETJ. Currently the ETJ extends outside of Bexar County into Comal, Medina, and Kendall counties. However, the City is projected to expand into Bandera County in the future. Comal County is excluded from this incidental take coverage, since they hold their own ITP. Additionally, voluntarily acquired preserves under the SEP dHCP within the seven county Plan Area will also be covered by the ITP.

The City of San Antonio has been successfully implementing a similar conservation easement program as part of their Edwards Aquifer Protection Program. The City has passed three ordinances since 2000 to purchase lands, mostly through conservation easements, over the

Edwards Aquifer Recharge and Contributing zones throughout Bexar and surrounding counties. To date the City has successfully conserved 125,000 acres of land.

**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 construction, use, and maintenance of land development projects; farm and ranch improvements; commercial or industrial projects; construction, maintenance, or improvement of public infrastructure; installation and maintenance of utility infrastructure; construction, use, maintenance and expansion of quarries, gravel mining, or other similar extraction projects; and any activities necessary to manage habitat for the Covered Species that could temporarily result in incidental take.

**Q: Who is the permittee for the Incidental Take Permit?**

**A:** The proposed Incidental Take Permit will be jointly held the City of San Antonio and Bexar County.

**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 30 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 March 19, 2015. 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 fax (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 meetings be held on the draft Habitat Conservation Plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement?**

**A:** Public meetings will be held during the comment period. The exact locations and times for the meeting will be noticed in local newspapers, on the Service's Austin Ecological Services Office website (<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>) and at <http://www.sephcp.com> at least two weeks prior to each event.