



US FISH & WILDLIFE COOPERATIVE ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION FUND ('CESCF') GRANT

COMMISSIONERS COURT

REGULAR MEETING

SEPTEMBER 27, 2021

D. BLACKBURN
COUNTY JUDGE



BACKGROUND

- April 27, 2021 ... County Judge receives a call from US Fish & Wildlife that Bell County is now a “county of interest” as it relates to listed and/or candidates species associated with Karst geological formations that occur in Bell County
- Short version ...
 - Karst formations are geological formations where species of invertebrates live , typically caves and such
 - The invertebrates that live in these formations are ‘trogllobites’ , meaning the species live their entire life in underground habitats



BACKGROUND (CON'T)

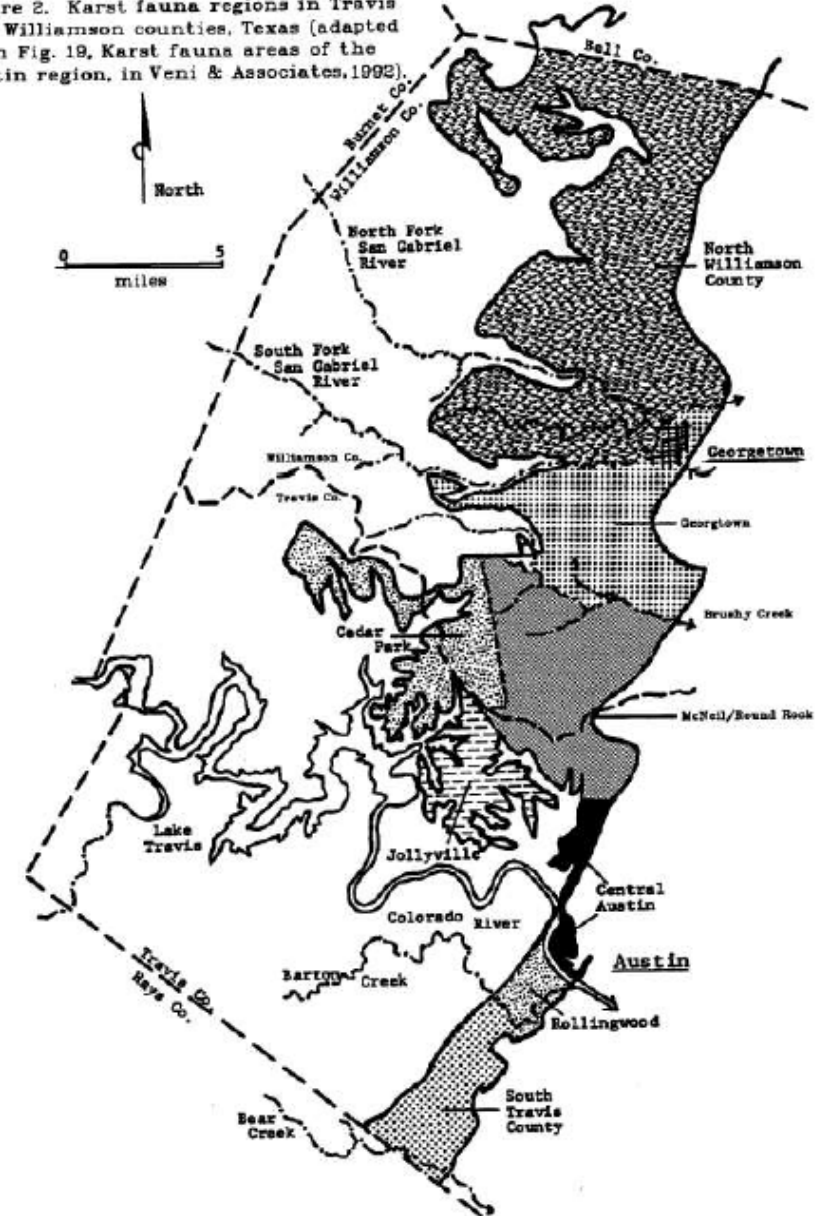
- US Fish & Wildlife has been in the process of mapping where these troglobites live (and where they might live) since at least the 1990's
- This was a map of 'Karst Fauna Regions' dated 1994 ...

KFRs & Zones – A Brief History

+ Travis and Williamson Counties Recovery Plan (1994)

- Adapted 11 KFAs into 8 Karst Fauna Regions
- Used as Recovery Units for the species

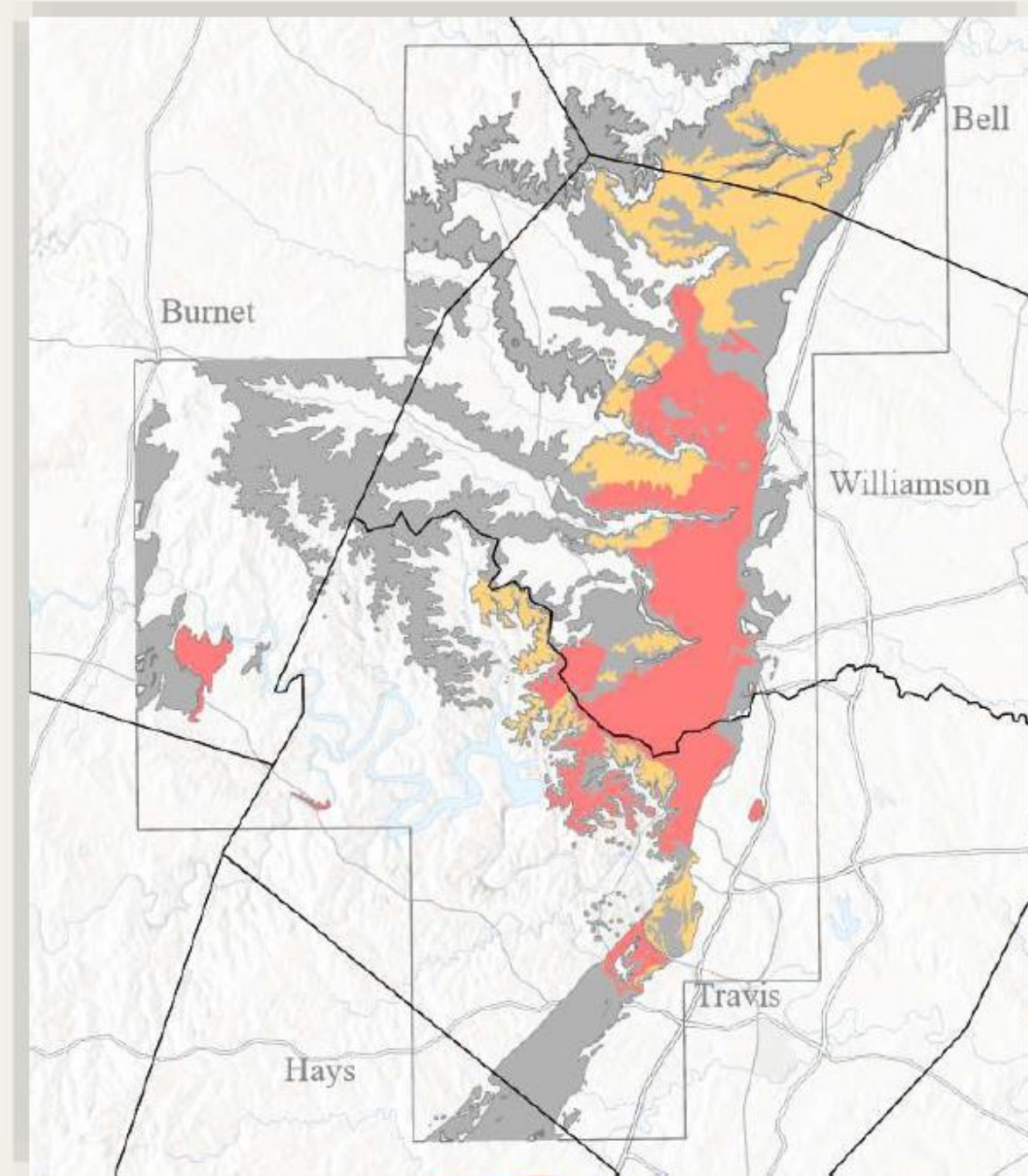
Figure 2. Karst fauna regions in Travis and Williamson counties, Texas (adapted from Fig. 19, Karst fauna areas of the Austin region, in Veni & Associates, 1992).



KFRs & Zones – A Brief History

+ Veni and Martinez 2007

- Provided updated karst zones in GIS
- Provided separate files for rare species and endangered species karst zones
 - Zone 1 - areas known to contain endangered cave fauna;
 - Zone 2 - areas having a high probability of suitable habitat for endangered invertebrate cave fauna
 - Zone 3 - areas that probably do not contain endangered cave fauna
 - Zone 4 - areas which do not contain endangered cave fauna.



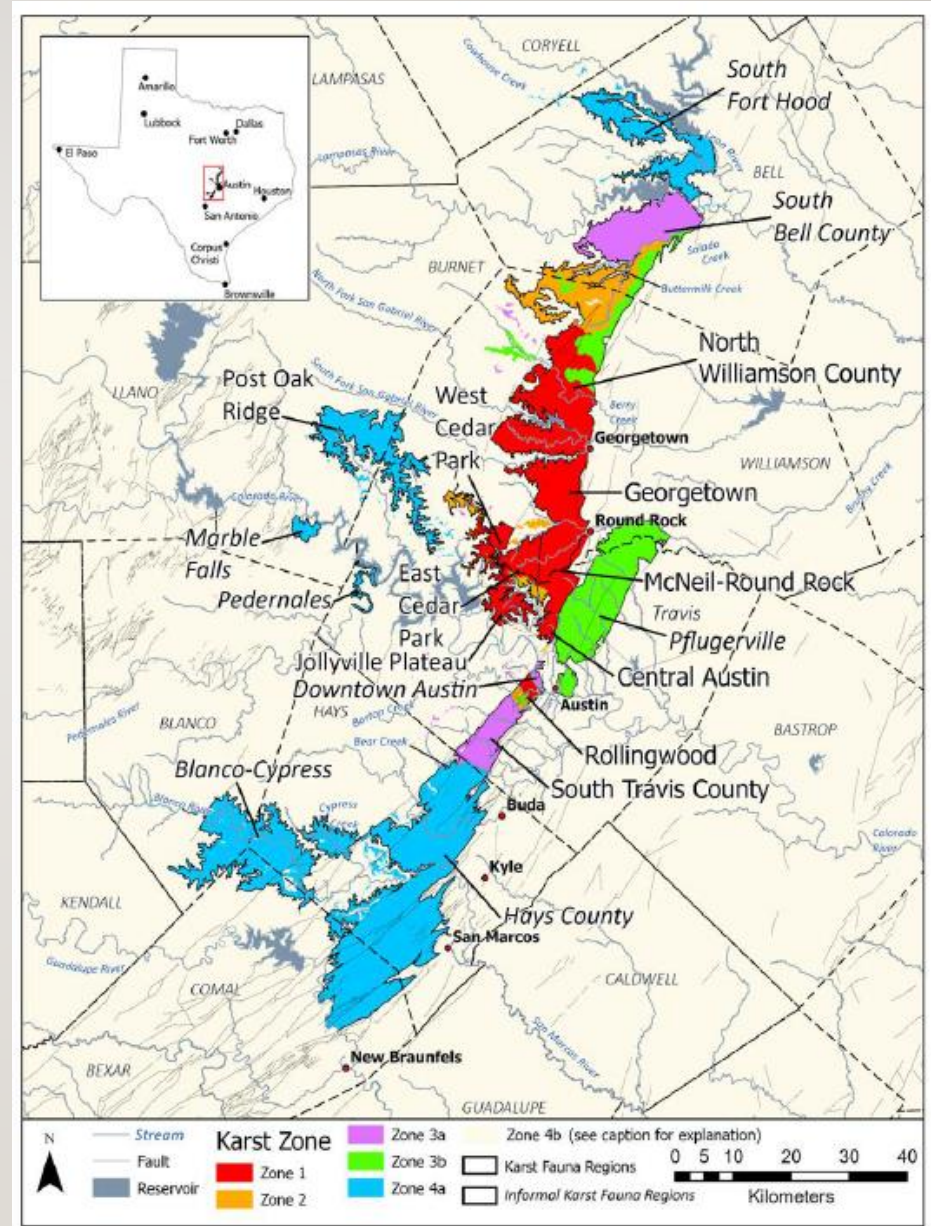
Veni and Jones 2021

- + Veni, G and M. Jones. 2021. Statistical Analysis and Revision of Endangered Karst Species Distribution, Austin Area, Texas. National Cave and Karst Research Institute Report of Investigation 10. Carlsbad, New Mexico. 58 pp.
- + Update and revise Karst Fauna regions and karst zones
- + Considered modeling geology, hydrology, cave microclimates, surface climate, vegetation, and soils but most didn't have sufficient data or the needed resolution
- + Reversed analysis:
 - Determined and analyzed the range of distribution for each species
 - Clusters of multiple range margins were interpreted to reflect the presence of a barrier or restriction for species distribution
 - Looked for geologic contacts, faults, streams, soils or other factors within the area where the range margins clustered

2021 KARST ZONE MAP

19 'MOSTLY DISTINCT' REGIONS

(UP FROM THE 8
REGIONS IDENTIFIED IN
THE 1994 MAP)



SO, WHAT DOES IT ALL THAT MEAN FOR BELL COUNTY (AND OTHERS) ?

- It is clear that the reach of the ESA continues to expand
- Not a question of if listed or threatened or endangered species are going to be found in our community ... simply a question of when
- The real question is how can we best prepare for and manage for a listed species in order to protect the species and continue to allow for the growth and development of our community
- We need to start a frank discussion about habitat conservation plans ('HCP')

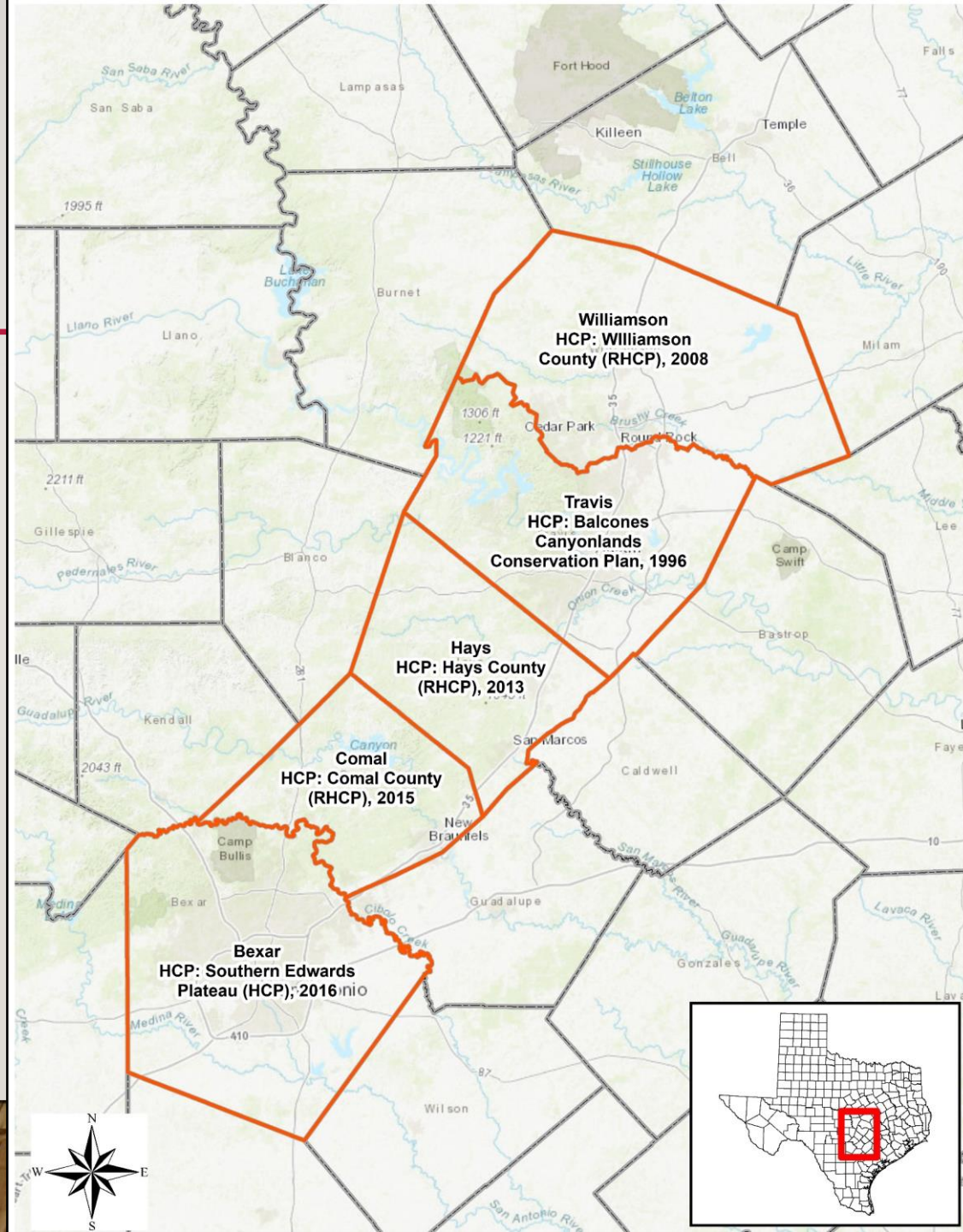


WHAT IS AN HCP ?

- HCP's are a required part of an application for an 'incidental take permit' under the Endangered Species Act...a permit that must be issued by Fish to private and/or public entities that undertake projects (i.e., road projects, subdivision projects) that might result in the disturbance or destruction of an endangered or threatened species
- Short version of how a typical HCP works
 - Geographic area for coverage of the HCP is identified
 - Species are identified that will be covered in the HCP
 - Mitigation strategies are identified (to include land acquisition) and executed over 30-year timeframe



EXAMPLES OF OTHER HCPS





STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS OUTCOME ... TO DATE

- Pursue a Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF) grant application with US Fish to support the development and implementation of an HCP for Bell & Coryell counties
- Pursue an MOU and/or Interlocal Agreement between all interested stakeholders to identify structure, management and funding for the development and implementation of an HCP for Bell & Coryell counties



CEDCF GRANT FOR DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION OF AN HCP

- The CESCFC grant program is an annual, competitive process
- The CESCFC grant application 'window' is January to March each year
- Historically, around \$10,000,000 is available for grants nationwide
- The maximum award any applicant might receive is \$1,000,000
- In FY2019 (last granting process), grant awards ranged from \$358,000 to \$1,000,000
- US Fish has indicated we are in a 'favorable' position for this next grant cycle



CESCF GRANT

- CESCF grant is a 75/25 grant ... 25% of the match must come from the applicant
- 25% match may be 'in kind' ... prior successful grantee's submitted consultant time as 'in kind' match
- Assistance is needed to put the grant application together ... an outside consultant (whose services would be part of the grant application)
- Estimated time for the consultant to put together the application is about 60-90 days



Bat Cave Spider

Bee Cave Harvestman Spider



Coffin Cave Mold Beetle