

2. Amendments to the EAHCP to Define Proportional Expansion and Restoration Reaches

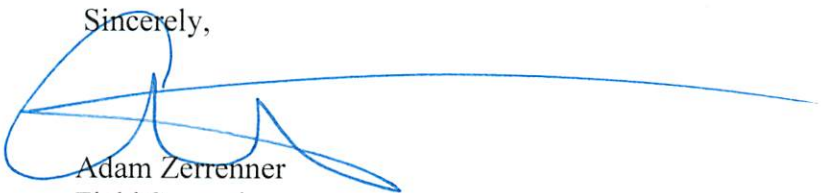
In the context of the EAHCP, the phrase “proportional expansion” refers to the EAHCP objective to restore additional habitat beyond the identified study reaches in equal proportion to the habitat restored in the study reaches (EAHCP section 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.1.2). At the time that the EAHCP was developed, these required additional restoration areas were not identified. The current proposal amends the EAHCP to define specifically where these expanded restoration areas will be located in both the Comal and San Marcos Rivers. The “restoration reaches” will be in addition to the habitat restoration efforts currently underway in the study reaches. The identification of the restoration reaches allows the Permittees to begin planning, budgeting, and implementing restoration in the identified reaches. The identification of the restoration is consistent with the EAHCP requirement for expanded restoration proportional to the amount of restoration implemented in the study reaches.

3. Amendments to the EAHCP Table 4-1 and 4-21

Tables 4-1 and 4-21 in the EAHCP list specific plant species to be used in the restoration of aquatic habitat. The Permittees have found through experience that certain species of aquatic plants are more effective for habitat restoration; therefore, the Permittees propose to make substitutions and additions to the plant species listed in tables 4-1 and 4-21 to maximize restoration efficiency. For example, *Potamogeton* is substituted for *Hydrophila* in the Comal River (Table 4-1), and Texas wild rice is added to the list in the San Marcos system (Table 4-21). Each plant species is associated with an estimated density of fountain darters. Overall, this change will result in approximately 15 percent less estimated fountain darters in the San Marcos River and approximately 15 percent more estimated fountain darters in the Comal River. The requested amendments will improve the sustainability of the habitat restoration efforts, increase Texas wild rice coverage in the San Marcos River, and are consistent with the EAHCP Biological Goals and Objectives. Therefore, we agree to the revisions to Table 4-1 and Table 4-21.

These amendments to the EAHCP do not change the terms and conditions of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permit TE-63663A-1 or change any impacts previously described in the EAHCP, the EAHCP Environmental Impact Statement, or the Service’s Endangered Species Act Section 7 biological opinion. Thank you for your continued commitment to conserving the native species of the Edwards Aquifer.

Sincerely,



Adam Zerrenner
Field Supervisor