



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:17-6172

Agenda Item Number: 22.

Agenda Date: 12/14/2017

In Control: City Council A Session

DEPARTMENT: Parks and Recreation

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Xavier D. Urrutia

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City Wide

SUBJECT:

Edwards Aquifer Protection Program - Conservation Easement Acquisitions

SUMMARY:

Consideration of the following ordinances associated with two conservation easements totaling 641.153 acres over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

- A) An ordinance authorizing payment in the amount of \$1,040,507.84 to Texas Heritage Title Company as escrow agent for title on a conservation easement, due diligence and closing costs on a 437.253 acre tract of land known as the East Verde Creek Ranch located in Medina County, Texas.
- B) An ordinance authorizing payment in the amount of \$289,456.35 to Mission Title Company as escrow agent for title on a conservation easement, due diligence and closing costs on a 203.9 acre tract of land known as the Honeycutt Ranch located in Uvalde County, Texas.

These actions also authorize the execution of necessary documents to accomplish said acquisitions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The purpose of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program is to obtain property rights by fee simple purchase or conservation easements of land over the sensitive zones of the Edwards Aquifer. This program was initiated in May 2000 when voters approved Proposition 3, a 1/8-cent sales tax venue up to \$45 million for the acquisition of lands over the Edwards Aquifer for parks and watershed protection. Proposition 3 ran from 2000 through 2005 and was limited to Bexar County. The 2005 Proposition 1 program was an extension of the initial voter-

approved Edwards Aquifer protection endeavor and was extended by voters in 2010 and renewed again in 2015. Changes in state legislation allowed watershed protection activities to expand outside of Bexar County.

The proposed purchases of conservation easements on the East Verde Creek Ranch and Honeycutt Ranch tracts are located over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone respectively in Medina and Uvalde County. The properties were initially identified through use of the Scientific Evaluation Team's GIS Spatial Model and subsequent site visits identified favorable recharge features on the properties which are located within prioritized watersheds. The East Verde Creek Ranch is located within the Middle Verde Creek and Verde Creek drainage basin and Honeycutt Ranch tract is located within the Sabinal River drainage basin which, combined with faults and fractures, contribute to significant recharge of the Edwards Aquifer. The Edwards Aquifer Authority issued a geological assessment of the properties confirming that preservation of East Verde Creek Ranch would provide very high water quantity and high water quality benefits for the City of San Antonio while Honeycutt Ranch will provide moderate water quantity and high water quality benefits.

If approved, inclusion of these properties will increase the total protected lands under the City's aquifer protection program by approximately 641.153 acres for a total of 149,329 acres.

ISSUE:

- A) This ordinance authorizes payment in the amount of \$1,040,507.84 to Texas Heritage Title Company as escrow agent for title on a conservation easement, due diligence and closing costs on a 437.253-acre tract of land known as the East Verde Creek Ranch located in Medina County, Texas.
- B) This ordinance authorizes payment in the amount of \$289,456.35 to Mission Title Company as escrow agent for title on a conservation easement, due diligence and closing costs on a 203.9-acre tract of land known as the Honeycutt Ranch located in Uvalde County, Texas.

Acquisition of these properties is consistent with policy for implementation of the Proposition 1 Edwards Aquifer Protection Venue Project as approved by voters. The City Council-appointed Conservation Advisory Board reviewed and recommended the acquisition of these conservation easements at the September 27, 2017, meeting.

ALTERNATIVES:

An alternative would be to defer acquisition until a later date subject to the property owners' willingness to sell real estate interests and future market conditions. Additionally, other properties could be targeted for acquisition foregoing this conservation easement and losing the moderate to very high water quality and high quantity benefits and the opportunity to protect additional acreage within the Middle Verde Creek, Verde Creek and Sabinal River watersheds.

FISCAL IMPACT:

- A) This acquisition is a one-time expenditure in the amount of \$1,040,507.84. Funds for the acquisition of this conservation easement have been appropriated through Proposition 1 of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Sales Tax fund included in the FY 2018 Capital Budget.
- B) This acquisition is a one-time expenditure in the amount of \$289,456.35. Funds for the acquisition of this conservation easement have been appropriated through Proposition 1 of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Sales Tax fund included in the FY 2018 Capital Budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A) Staff recommends approval of the acquisition of a conservation easement on the 437.253- acre tract of land known as the East Verde Creek Ranch for a total of \$1,040,507.84 under the Proposition 1 Edwards Aquifer Protection Venue Project.
- B) Staff recommends approval of the acquisition of a conservation easement on the 203.9- acre tract of land known as the Honeycutt Ranch for a total of \$289,456.35 under the Proposition 1 Edwards Aquifer Protection Venue Project.

The Contracts Disclosure Forms required by the Ethics ordinance are attached.