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Service Announces Scoping for Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District Proposed Habitat Conservation Plan for the Barton Springs and Austin Blind Salamanders

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces a public scoping period associated with development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) regarding the proposed Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District (District) draft Habitat Conservation Plan (dHCP) for the Barton Springs and Austin blind salamanders. The District is preparing a draft Habitat Conservation Plan that will address the take of the two salamanders associated with the management and use of the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer in Central Texas. This announcement begins a 30-day public comment period.

The District is a political subdivision of the State of Texas with a legislative mandate to conserve, preserve, and protect the groundwater resources, including springflows, of the aquifers within its jurisdictional area. It regulates groundwater within its jurisdiction by adopting, implementing, and enforcing regulations and management programs that address water demand, springflow protection, aquifer recharge, and other management strategies. The proposed permit is intended to allow for the ongoing use of the Aquifer while conserving listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. The Service's draft Environmental Assessment will consider the proposed issuance of an Incidental Take Permit, supported by a HCP; no action and a reasonable range of other alternatives.

A public scoping meeting will be held in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act at the BSEACD Offices, 1124 Regal Row, Austin, Texas 78748, on Thursday, April 3, 2014, from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. The primary purpose of this meeting is to solicit suggestions and information on the scope of issues and alternatives to consider when drafting the EA.

For more information on these proposals or how to comment see the *Federal Register* notice at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>, or contact Mr. Adam Zerrenner, Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758-4460; telephone 512/490-0057; fax 512/490-0974; or electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

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