



MATTHEW LECHNER

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Aquatic Ecologist

1997-2003

“

Community is based on a collection of shared core values. Barton Creek and the Barton Springs aquifer provide a foundation upon which to build those core values.”

From 1997-2003, I worked as an aquatic ecologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Austin. My main responsibilities were the Barton Springs Salamander and the other related salamander species found in the region. That job was certainly the obvious link that sparked my involvement, but my personal love of natural communities was also a driving force. Additionally working among the local community empowered our work and enhanced the outcomes. Working with many people in Austin certainly raised the bar and allowed for a synergistic energy that accomplished much more than any individual could accomplish on their own.

I worked on many, many individual projects but will highlight the three most significant in order to be brief. When I first came to Austin it was soon after the Barton Springs salamander was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Some of the more militant members of the development community had sued the City of Austin trying to use the listing to close Barton Springs and penalize the environmental community. Working with the City of Austin, I facilitated a habitat conservation plan that kept Barton Springs open to the public and improved conditions for the salamanders. It was tough to please so many people with so many opinions (especially with the

Endangered Species Act as the bottom-line). In the end, federal judge, Sam Sparks, concluded that the City of Austin and the Fish and Wildlife Service were working together for the benefit of the salamanders and the people.

One individual project that spurred quite a controversy was the Longhorn Pipeline. Working with the EPA and the U.S. Department of Transportation, we were able to make the pipeline across the aquifer the safest pipeline possible. One pipeline expert told me that it was the safest pipeline in North America and maybe the world but he didn't know much about European pipelines.

Probably the most significant contribution that I made was the development and application of water quality protection measures to the aquifer beyond the reach of the City of Austin jurisdiction. Using the Endangered Species Act and its relationship with the Clean Water Act we were able to get large developments to follow water quality protection measures designed to minimize impacts to the watershed. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Lower Colorado River Authority ensured that the measure would be followed in their efforts to comply with the Endangered Species Act. I believe these efforts greatly reduced development impacts to the Barton Springs aquifer.

MATTHEW LECHNER CONT'D

Community is based on a collection of shared core values. Barton Creek and the Barton Springs aquifer provide a foundation upon which to build those core values. While this Barton Creek Time Stream will show a long and complex history of which to be very proud, the truth is the job will never end. So bring the young ones up with an appreciation for nature and we can keep the hope fires burning. Because in the end, it is the people that will correct our mistakes and therein lies our future hope.

