

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: NOTICE OF INTENT TO AWARD

This announcement is not a request for applications.

This announcement is to provide public notice of the National Park Service's intention to award financial assistance for the following project activities without competition.

ABSTRACT	
Funding Announcement Number	P17AS00106
Project Title	Protect Mexican blindcat by prioritizing inventories of cave ecosystems
Recipient	The Santa Antonio Zoo
Anticipated Federal Funding	\$0
Non-federal Cost Share	\$0
Anticipated Period of Performance	March 16, 2017 – March 16, 2022
Award Instrument	Master Cooperative Agreement
Statutory Authority	54 U.S.C. §101702(a)
CFDA # and Title	15.944 Natural Resource Stewardship
Single Source Justification Criteria	Unique Qualifications
Point of Contact	Katie Gaertner, Katie_gaertner@nps.gov (303) 969-2909

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Amistad National Recreation Area (AMIS) has significant cave and karst features that have not been fully identified or inventoried for their biological or cultural resources and recreation opportunities. Program goals are to perform biological inventories of cave fauna and better understand the distribution and conservation status of the federally endangered Mexican blindcat (a blind catfish species) in the US. The development of a cave management plan will help set conservation goals for cave species and open appropriate caves for recreational caving. The Mexican blindcat was discovered in a cave at AMIS in 2016 and is the only known location for the species in the US. This species, along with other potential new discoveries, are in critical need of management and conservation, but the park lacks the biological information to set management goals until resources are more fully inventoried. The health of the Mexican blindcat and other cave species is ultimately tied with clean and healthy aquifers that humans also depend on. The program will naturally lend itself to developing and furthering education about the interdependence of aquifer animals and human populations through our partners. One of the first primary goals for the Mexican blindcat is the maintenance of a captive population in order to ensure their survival, given the threat of extinction in the wild. The San Antonio Zoo has a dedicated department and personnel for the conservation and research of cave and karst species. Karst species live in extremely unique and specialized environments (temperature, humidity, lighting, etc.), and the San Antonio Zoo has dedicated facilities for the care of karst species that meets their ecological and physiological requirements. In addition, they have a staff of highly qualified personnel in animal husbandry, as well as cave and karst research field techniques. Conducting research in caves requires specialized research techniques, as well as the highest standards of care to avoid negatively impacting cave resources. Managers of caves on federal lands are directed to identify and recognize cave resources under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988; caves also receive special protection under the National Historic Preservation Act, the Archeological Resources Protection Act, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act due to cultural resource concerns; and cave locations are also exempt from FOIA requests under section 207 of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 to ensure their protection. Because they were also sometimes used as burial sites by prehistoric people, their locations are protected and not shared with the general public. The San Antonio Zoo and their associated staff in the caving community have built a professional relationship with park staff over decades of research and collaboration in Texas. Through this

relationship, park staff have the utmost confidence in their ability to follow proper procedures and guidelines and thus advance understanding of park cave/karst resources.

STATEMENT OF WORK

The Recipient agrees to:

1. Locate and map cave/karst features and drainage features;
2. Perform biological inventories of cave fauna at Amistad National Recreation Area;
3. Provide expert opinion for management and conservation of sensitive cave species;
4. Provide for care and maintenance of endangered captive Mexican blindcat individuals at zoo facilities;

NPS agrees to:

1. Select appropriate cave/karst features for biological surveys;
2. Review data collected from caves;
3. Provide logistical support, including coordination with law enforcement protection, and boat transportation to survey areas;
4. Ensure the protection of sensitive cave resources and their locations;
5. Oversee research activities including proper procedures for specimen collection and preservation following NPS museum guidelines;
6. ensure that all cave research activities are performed safely and in accordance with caving protocols

SINGLE-SOURCE JUSTIFICATION

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SINGLE SOURCE POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Department of the Interior Policy (505 DM 2) and National Park Service Policy FAP&P 1443-2015-06 requires a written justification which explains why competition is not practicable for each single-source award. The justification must address one or more of the following criteria as well as discussion of the program legislative history, unique capabilities of the proposed recipient, and cost-sharing contribution offered by the proposed recipient, as applicable.

In order for an assistance award to be made without competition, the award must satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

- (1) Unsolicited Proposal – The proposed award is the result of an unsolicited assistance application which represents a unique or innovative idea, method, or approach which is not the subject of a current or planned contract or assistance award, but which is deemed advantageous to the program objectives;
- (2) Continuation – The activity to be funded is necessary to the satisfactory completion of, or is a continuation of, an activity presently being funded, for which competition would have a significant adverse effect on the continuity or completion of the activity. A single source on the basis of continuation must demonstrate that competition would result in a substantial duplicate cost to the government that cannot be recovered through competition.;
- (3) Legislative intent – The language in the applicable authorizing legislation or legislative history clearly indicates Congress' intent to restrict the award to a particular recipient of purpose;
- (4) Unique Qualifications – The applicant is uniquely qualified to perform the activity based upon a variety of demonstrable factors such as location, property ownership, voluntary support capacity, cost-sharing ability if applicable, technical expertise, or other such unique qualifications;
- (5) Emergencies – Program/award where there is insufficient time available (due to a compelling and unusual urgency, or substantial danger to health or safety) for adequate competitive procedures to be followed.

NPS did not solicit full and open competition for this award based the following criteria:

The San Antonio Zoo has a dedicated department and personnel for the conservation and research of cave and karst species. Karst species live in extremely unique and specialized environments (temperature, humidity, lighting, etc.), and the San Antonio Zoo has dedicated facilities for the care of karst species that meets their ecological and physiological requirements. In addition, they have a group of staff and partners who are qualified personnel in animal husbandry, as well as cave and karst research field techniques. Conducting research in caves requires highly specialized research techniques, as well as the highest standards of care to avoid negatively impacting sensitive cave resources. Because park caves were also sometimes used as burial sites by prehistoric peoples, their locations are protected and not shared with the general public. Furthermore, there is a threat of poaching for the Mexican blindcat, and their locations need to be protected. The San Antonio Zoo and their associated staff in the caving community have built a professional relationship with

park staff over decades of research and collaboration in Texas. Through this relationship, park staff have the utmost confidence in their ability to follow proper procedures and guidelines and thus advance understanding of park cave/karst resources. The ability to cost-share this project by The San Antonio Zoo staff and Dr. Hendrickson were also not available in park research for other partners. These staff, which will include Dr. Hendrickson and half of the survey team from the Zoo on field trips, are not charging for their time on inventory trips. In addition, the Zoo will not charge overhead, nor expect payment for the continued maintenance and care of captive Mexican blindcat specimens. This contribution amounts to approximately \$70,800 in personnel charges and \$25,000 in specimen maintenance over the course of the 5-year agreement. Project partners: Dean Hendrickson, Curator of Ichthyology at the University of Texas, has worked in fisheries conservation and guided the development of The Fishes of Texas project; Peter Sprouse, co-owner of Zara Environmental, has worked in cave research since the 1970s and has 10 cave species named after him in Texas and Mexico in recognition of his contributions to cave conservation; Andy Gluesenkamp, San Antonio Zoo, has worked in the Texas caving community for several decades and currently helps lead conservation and inventory projects around the world for cave species; Jean Krejca, co-owner Zara Environmental, has previously assisted the NPS in the Intermountain Region in developing research and management plans for cave/karst resources and has several decades of experience in the Texas caving community. Other entities researched during project development that could potentially carry out this work were 1) Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the state agency responsible for managing public wildlife resources; however, they lack the facilities to care for cave animals, and they lack the staff with necessary combination of cave biology expertise and animal husbandry to lead the project; 2) The Houston Zoo, but they lacked specialized facilities for the care of cave and karst species and have no pre-existing relationship with park staff, and 3) University of Texas, who do have basic laboratory facilities to care for cave animals in the short term, but not for the continued maintenance and care of species, and who would also have charged project overhead costs of approximately 17-20%. The first Mexican blindcats were housed at the University of Texas under the care of Dr. Hendrickson, but he personally worked to transfer them to the San Antonio Zoo because of his lab's inability to keep specimens alive and in good enough condition for natural breeding behaviors to occur. Dr. Hendrickson will continue to provide his expertise on this current project but is unable to provide full time logistical and administrative support.

The San Antonio Zoo was ultimately chosen for this project because of their specialized facilities to house karst species, qualified personnel, relationship with the park dating back to the mid- 1990s, and their ability to cost-share that was unmatched by other entities researched.