



NEWS

Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority and Guadalupe Basin Coalition Endorse Edwards Aquifer Legislation Sponsored by Senator Glenn Hegar

*Legislation would support a cooperative process to develop regional solutions to ensure
Comal and San Marcos Springs flow and Guadalupe River flow during droughts*

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Seguin, Texas - On Wednesday, March 6, the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) and the Guadalupe Basin Coalition (GBC) announced support for Senate Bill 1341, legislation by Senator Glenn Hegar that provides for implementation of a stakeholder process to determine the future management of the Edwards Aquifer.

The stakeholder process, referred to as the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program, could achieve a consensus agreement among all stakeholders to ensure that the Comal and San Marcos springs flows are protected during droughts, while encouraging conservation and the development of new supplies of water to meet the increasing demands of the region's rapidly growing population. The process, which already has begun with meetings in San Marcos and San Antonio, could also help avoid litigation over the aquifer that has cost millions in the past.

According to GBC chairman Tom Taggart, "This endorsement is in support of using the Recovery Implementation Program process for the Edwards Aquifer, instead of simply allowing more pumping from the aquifer regardless of the consequences. The process would bring together federal, state and local stakeholders to develop a science-based plan that protects springflows and the surface water rights of all who depend on the Edwards Aquifer. The legislation would also postpone certain key deadlines in the Edwards Aquifer Authority Act to provide time for the stakeholder process to work."

The Comal and San Marcos springs, which flow from the Edwards Aquifer, are the two largest springs west of the Mississippi River. Normally, they contribute about 30 percent of the base flow of the Guadalupe River as far down river as Victoria. But in a drought, they supply much more of the river's flow. For example, on September 5, 2006, the springs provided an estimated 86 percent of the water flowing past Victoria. The largest of the two springs, Comal Springs, alone accounted for 59 percent of the flow, while San Marcos Springs accounted for 27 percent. On this same date Comal Springs provided nearly 80 percent of the flow of the Guadalupe River in New Braunfels. San Marcos Springs also supplies the base flow of the San Marcos River.

Regional conflict over the Edwards Aquifer started during the drought of record, which began in 1947 and ended in 1957. At the height of the drought in 1956, Comal Springs ceased to flow for nearly 5 months when 321,000 acre-feet were pumped from the aquifer. An acre-foot is equal to 325,851 gallons. Today, pumping from the Edwards Aquifer is evaluated for its effect on Comal and San Marcos Springs as part of the efforts to manage the aquifer and the Guadalupe River.

There have been calls to increase the cap on permits for pumping from the Edwards Aquifer to 549,000 acre-feet annually, while allowing 340,000 acre-feet of pumping annually during a repeat

of the drought of record. An analysis of this scenario by the Texas Water Development Board was requested by State Rep. Patrick Rose last fall. The analysis recently was completed and determined that the increased pumping levels would dry up Comal Springs for more than two years during a repeat of the drought of record and reduce the average flow of the Comal Springs by nearly 10 percent, even with current drought management restrictions fully enforced.

"For those who depend on the Guadalupe River, such a result would be a disaster," Bill West, general manager of the GBRA said.

"Whether you depend on the Edwards Aquifer for direct well access to water, or on the Guadalupe River, which provides water for communities, industries, and the bay and estuary system at the coast, it is a resource that demands thoughtful, regional management," said West. "The Guadalupe's lifeblood is the springflow from the Comal and San Marcos springs, especially in times of drought. By using this cooperative process we can get everyone to the table and start moving forward on the water challenges that face us. Providing adequate water resources will only become more and more difficult to address in the future as our population and development increase."

Citing programs including the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program, the Upper Colorado and the San Juan Recovery Implementation Programs, the Platte River Endangered Species Partnership and the Lower Colorado Multi-species Conservation Program as examples of successful cooperative conservation efforts, Taggart said, "The process holds promise for achieving a consensus agreement on managing water resources in the area and could prevent litigation over the issue in the future."

"Both the Guadalupe Basin Coalition and GBRA are committed to working with all those involved to assure that we all have the water we're going to need for our citizens, the economic development required to sustain us all, and the natural environment that we all appreciate and want to keep for our children and grandchildren," he said.

The legislation would provide for participation of the following organizations in the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program process: the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Economic Geology, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Water Development Board, the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Agriculture, the EAA, San Antonio Water System (SAWS), the South Central Water Advisory Committee, the GBRA, the Guadalupe Basin Coalition, the Texas Farm Bureau, environmental groups and other concerned state and federal agencies.

"Those who depend on water resources from the Edwards Aquifer and the Guadalupe River Basin are urged to encourage their legislators to support the Hegar Bill," Taggart said.

The GBRA was established by the Texas Legislature in 1933 as a water conservation and reclamation district. GBRA provides stewardship for the water resources in its ten-county statutory district, which begins near the headwaters of the Guadalupe and Blanco Rivers, ends at San Antonio Bay, and includes Kendall, Comal, Hays, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales, DeWitt, Victoria, Calhoun and Refugio counties. The mission of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority is to "protect, conserve, reclaim and steward the resources of the ten-county District in order to ensure and promote quality of life for those we serve."

The Guadalupe Basin Coalition is an association of businesses, Chambers of Commerce, and governmental entities in counties along the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers that are bonded by a common concern for the sustainable viability of the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers both economically and environmentally. The GBC works actively to protect the interests of the Guadalupe River watershed.

Snapshot of the Contribution of Comal and San Springs to the Flow in the Guadalupe River During the Current Drought

