

Should San Antonio Reallocate Sales Taxes Dedicated to the Edwards Aquifer Protection and Greenway Trails Programs?

San Antonio has been blessed with the Edwards Aquifer - one of the most prolific natural sources of water to be found anywhere in the world. Approximately 1,250 square miles of Edwards Limestone is exposed at the ground surface. This is the Recharge Zone where water enters the Aquifer with little to no filtration. Surface water from springs and streams originating on the Contributing Zone reaches the Recharge Zone, where much of the flow sinks into the Edwards Limestone with no filtration. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) designated the Edwards as the major aquifer in the state most vulnerable to pollution.

Efforts to preserve water quality to the Edwards through regulation have been mostly ineffective in providing protection to the land that recharges the Aquifer. City of San Antonio water quality ordinances enacted in 1995 were largely ignored; claims of vested rights that exempted new developments from regulation were still being validated as recently as 2015.

Concerned that degradation of water quality from urban development might one day necessitate pretreating water that SAWS distributes from its Edwards wells – an enormously expensive prospect - advocates in San Antonio began to look at purchase of land on the Recharge Zone as the most certain way to protect the primary source of San Antonio's water supply. In 2000 San Antonio voters approved the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP), which allocated 1/8-of-a-cent addition to the local sales tax to collect \$45 million to purchase sensitive properties located in the Recharge Zone in Bexar County.

In 2005, 2010, and 2015 voters approved reallocation of the 1/8-of-a-cent local sales tax to collect \$90 million for the purchase of sensitive properties and conservation easements on land located over the Edwards Aquifer (EAPP / Proposition 1) and \$80 million for the creation of linear creekway parks (the Greenways Trails System / Proposition 2). The program was expanded to include EAPP investments in Medina and Uvalde Counties, where much of the water that we pump in San Antonio enters the Aquifer. In 2015 an additional \$10 million was approved to fund research and model projects to determine how to best protect the highly urbanized portion of the Recharge Zone within San Antonio City Limits.

The EAPP has been recognized nationally and internationally as a successful and equitable method of paying rural landowners for ecological services that benefit a large urban population. In that San Antonio Water System (SAWS) relies on the Edwards Aquifer for 80% of its current water supply, all citizens benefit from efforts to maintain the high quality of Edwards water. Due to the high quality of this source, SAWS has had the luxury of drilling Edwards wells as needed to serve the City with water that requires no pre-treatment prior to distribution. In the event that water from SAWS Edwards wells might fail to meet EPA standards, the cost of retroactively installing infrastructure to pretreat Edwards water to meet those standards would be in the billions of dollars. It is therefore incumbent on us to do all that we can to preserve this precious water resource.

Future of the Program

To date, more than 160,000 acres of land have been preserved through the EAPP. Combining all portions of the Recharge and Contributing zones that contribute to San Antonio's water supply, the total watershed geographically applicable to the EAPP is between 2.5 and 2.8 million acres. When viewed in this manner, the total protected area of the watershed as of the end of 2018 is about six percent, meaning that about 94% of this area remains unprotected. Much of the area in need of protection is within the Edwards Aquifer Contributing Zone. Land in this area proximal to San Antonio is rapidly being developed without adequate regulatory protection.

We anticipated that a vote to reallocate the sales tax funding for both programs would be scheduled for 2020. This is especially needed to continue the successful implementation of the EAPP as land values continue to rise. When we learned that Henry Cisneros and others proposed to reallocate the 1/8 sales tax to fund transportation projects, the fifteen San Antonio member groups met to discuss this option. After much discussion all these groups unanimously decided to support the continued allocation of the sales tax for the EAPP.

Given the popularity of the EAPP, which was approved by 78% of the voters in 2015, we hope that San Antonio's City Council will approve a ballot measure for a vote on continuation of the Program in 2020. At the least, we call upon our elected officials to present voters with the choice on the November 2020 ballot between devoting the 1/8 of a cent sales tax to the EAPP and Greenways Trails System or to ConnectSA.

To learn more about how the EAPP is managed [click here](#).

Put this section in to the link above (and add to the EAPP section under issues and initiatives):

Management of San Antonio's Edwards Aquifer Protection Program

Careful consideration is given to the selection of appropriate properties for acquisition as part of the EAPP. A Scientific Evaluation Team (SET) consisting of aquifer experts convened to prioritize undeveloped properties based on their environmental characteristics in order to achieve maximum value for voter-approved dollars. The SET is comprised of scientific experts representing various disciplines from an assortment of agencies and institutions, including the Edwards Aquifer Authority, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey and the San Antonio Water System. The SET produced a GIS-based model to identify and rank sensitive properties for inclusion in the EAPP. The SET model serves as a decision-making tool for the program's Conservation Advisory Board (CAB) and Land Acquisition Team (LAT) to assist in identifying properties that may be considered for the conservation easement program. The model uses a variety of indicators to identify properties that contain unique and desirable features that warrant long term protection based on attributes that are valuable to enhancing water quality and quantity over sensitive areas of the Edwards Aquifer. The model utilizes multiple datasets that reflect the most current information regarding items such as: permeability of the Edwards limestone below the surface; the streams and creeks flowing over the surface; the types of plants present; and the adjacency to existing preserved open spaces. Following acquisition, the environmental characteristics of each of the protected properties are

monitored and evaluated on an annual basis to ensure compliance with aquifer protection program guidelines and restrictions.