

Member Organizations

Alamo, Austin, and Lone Star chapters of the Sierra Club
Bexar Audubon Society
Austin, Bexar and Travis Green Parties
Bexar Grotto
Boerne Together
Bulverde Neighborhood Alliance
Bulverde Neighbors for Clean Water
Cibolo Nature Center
Citizens for the Protection of Cibolo Creek
Comal County Conservation Alliance
Environment Texas
First Universalist Unitarian Church of San Antonio
Friends of Canyon Lake
Friends of Dry Comal Creek
Friends of Government Canyon
Fuerza Unida
Green Society of UTSA
Guadalupe River Road Alliance
Guardians of Lick Creek
Headwaters at Incarnate Word
Helotes Heritage Association
Hill Country Planning Association
Kendall County Well Owners Association
Kinney County Ground Zero
Leon Springs Business Association
Medina County Environmental Action
Native Plant Society of Texas – SA
Northwest Interstate Coalition of Neighborhoods
Preserve Castroville
Preserve Lake Dunlop Association
Preserve Our Hill Country Environment
San Antonio Audubon Society
San Antonio Conservation Society
San Geronimo Valley Alliance
San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance
San Marcos River Foundation
Save Barton Creek Association
Save Our Springs Alliance
Scenic Loop/Boerne Stage Alliance
Securing a Future Environment
SEED Coalition
Signal Hill Area Alliance
Solar San Antonio
Sisters of the Divine Providence
Texas Cave Management Association
Trinity Edwards Spring Protection Association
Water Aid – Texas State University
Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation
Wimberley Valley Watershed Association

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April 28, 2021

City of San Antonio Conservation Advisory Board
Comments on Agenda Item 21-3280 Staff Briefing - Without Ordinance - Follow-up briefing regarding infrastructure easement requests: City staff and San Antonio Water System

Chairman Romero and Members of the Conservation Advisory Board,

I submit these comments on behalf of the 54 member organizations and thousands of individual members of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (GEAA).

We understand San Antonio Water System (SAWS) is presenting a plan to run water mains and a 15" oversized sewer main through properties conserved through the EAPP to protect our Edwards Aquifer water supply in order to serve a new development on the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

That tax money was used to protect properties and conservation easements acquired by the City for the express purpose of protecting San Antonio's primary source of water should prohibit such a plan. Between January 2008 and May 2012 eighty-three spills totaling 809,000 gallons (2.5 acre/feet) of raw sewage occurred on Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone¹. The vast majority of these spills occurred in sewage infrastructure under SAWS management. Some were not recognized nor reported for undetermined periods of time. While we applaud SAWS efforts to address these problems, we believe it would be unconscionable to expose properties - selected for protection based on criteria that ranks them as extremely vulnerable to rapid transmission of pollution into the Edwards Aquifer - to trenching for water and waste water lines, not to mention transmission of sewage for many years to come.

SAWS will tell you that they are required to serve the Specht tract because it is within their CCN. This is true but, they are required to do so only because they petitioned the State for exclusive service rights over a large area on the Edwards Aquifer Recharge and Contributing zones that extend into Comal and Kendall counties.

In 2010 GEAA contested two requests to expand the SAWS CCN into Aquifer zones in Kendall and Medina counties. As a result, SAWS withdrew these applications. Because GEAA lacked the resources to contest the application to expand SAWS CCN on the ERZ east, into Comal County, that application was granted. I mention this because I recall at least one instance when SAWS agreed to release a development in Comal County within their CCN from the requirement to hook up to SAWS infrastructure, allowing them instead to build their own.

So, SAWS has two options here: they could agree to allow the development of the Specht tract to be released from any requirements for a service contract with SAWS or, they could petition the State to remove this area from their CCN.

¹ <https://aquiferalliance.org/Library/GEAAPublications/FinalReport-GEO4427.pdf>

GEAA prefers the latter option. Texas Commission for Environmental Quality staff who regulate CCN's for the State assured me that this is possible. They even showed me the form they had available for this purpose.

At this time, I do not know whether or not SAWS has finalized a service contract with the developers of the Specht tract. If they knowingly did so without apprising the SAWS Trustees and City elected officials that the contract would require SAWS to traverse EAPP protected lands with sewage infrastructure and, if they did not involve them in this decision, I believe a serious look into how SAWS is making these decisions is in order.

In a 2014 presentation to the SAWS Board², GEAA recommended:

That SAWS amend SAWS Certificates of Convenience and Necessity (Water CCN #10640 and Sewer CCN #20285) to exclude the Edwards Aquifer Recharge and Contributing zones in Bexar and Comal counties

That the San Antonio Water Systems Board shall direct the San Antonio Water System to establish a policy prohibiting applications for extension of Certificates of Convenience and Necessity into areas eligible for Proposition 1 funds dedicated to the protection of the Edwards Aquifer.

That SAWS adopt a moratorium on issuing new Utility Service Contracts for water and waste water service on the Edwards Aquifer Recharge, Transition, and Contributing zones until such time as policies protective of these areas are adopted

GEAA has for many years asked our Mayor and City Council to convene a task force to provide direction to SAWS about the impacts of SAWS water and waste water service on growth over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge and Contributing zones. We believe that the action proposed by SAWS at your meeting today should require formal approval by a vote of the Mayor and City Council.

I do not know the purpose of SAWS presentation of this plan to the CAB as it does not seem to require any action or approval on your part. In as much as you have any authority in this matter, I would urge you to act to influence SAWS to abandon this plan. In that you have the credibility of expertise in Aquifer protection and management of EAPP acquisitions, which is presumably why you were appointed to this board, we urge you to use any influence that you have to advise the Mayor and City Council to oppose this plan and direct SAWS to find another option.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully,

Annalisa Peace
Executive Director
Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance