

GEAA

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Edwards
Aquifer
Alliance

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



The San Marcos River Foundation (SMRF) was formed as a 501c3 in 1985 to preserve public access and protect the flow, natural beauty and purity of the San Marcos River, its watershed and estuaries. The early years were spent sponsoring annual clean-ups, educating children and residents about the important species in the river, and working to create parks in the flood prone areas. Members began to pinpoint problem areas and water sampling began, and for the last 30 years SMRF has trained citizen scientists how to test water quality along the river, which is the best way to identify issues quickly and efficiently. SMRF has the largest group of water quality monitors in Texas, with 80 monthly volunteers, and trains approximately 300 new monitors for the state each year.

In the 1990's, SMRF contested the City of San Marcos wastewater treatment permit, ultimately leading to a cleaner discharge into the river, adding phosphorus treatment of the effluent, which is critical to the

prevention of algal growth and important for water quality since algae can often lead to reduced dissolved oxygen and fish kills. SMRF then confronted the City on its plans to withdraw river water to dilute discharge at the wastewater plant. Often referred to as a bed-and-banks permit, treatment plants use the bed and banks of the river to transport wastewater to their water plant downstream using the river water/wastewater combination. This case went all the way to the Texas Supreme Court, which upheld the Appeals Court ruling in favor of SMRF. SMRF also began researching water rights along the river, how the state regulates those and how low the river gets during dry times with all the previously granted water rights. This led to a 10 year legal battle for water rights to protect instream flows to the bays and estuaries that depend on freshwater from the San Marcos River. As the legal battle went on, SMRF worked with American Rivers to get the Guadalupe River declared one of the Top Endangered Rivers in 2003, bringing national publicity to our region's water problems. SMRF ultimately lost the battle for water rights, but the positive outcome was that SB3 was passed at the state legislature, creating the Bay/Basin Stakeholder process. This process allows citizens from different silos, including farmers, fishermen, cities, counties and environmental groups, to come together and review all scientific evidence regarding water needs in rivers and bays.

In 2005, SMRF began participating on the steering committee of the first watershed plan in the state of Texas, to develop a recovery plan for the highly degraded and contaminated Plum Creek watershed which flows into the San Marcos River at Luling. SMRF also participates in the Upper San Marcos Watershed Protection Plan, as well as many other committees to protect our natural resources, including land over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone. The recharge zone is critical to allow rainwater to soak into the ground through karst recharge features, and refill our aquifer which provides drinking water for over 2.5 million people in Central Texas. If rain water does not soak into the ground, it runs off and exacerbates flooding in an area all too familiar with flood events. Over the past 20 years SMRF has partnered with a variety of stakeholders and funders to create a contiguous greenbelt loop around the City of San Marcos to allow recharge to the aquifer and protect springflow for our river. This month, 102 acres will be purchased by Hays County with the Parks and Open Space bond funds, which will complete a contiguous greenbelt loop around the city.

SMRF is currently contesting 9 wastewater treatment permits, which is unprecedented for our area. We continue to monitor water quality and host monthly invasive species removals on Spring Lake in partnership with the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment. We work with landowners along the river to help them understand the importance of the riparian zone and why erosion control is so important to both water quality and the protection of land. We work with developers to guide them towards more sustainable best practices, and promote best practices at City Council meetings as well as County Commissioner meetings. There is so much more to say about the work that SMRF does on a daily basis, but a great resource is their newsletter to get involved with current events and volunteer opportunities. You can sign up for their newsletter at sanmarcosriver.org

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