



Press Release:

October 8, 2024

Milton Reimers Ranch Park
Travis County Regional Park

Today the nonprofits Save Our Springs Alliance and Save the Pedernales called again on the family of Dallas billionaire Steve Winn, owners of the proposed 1400-acre Mirasol Springs project, located next door to Travis County’s iconic Hamilton Pool Preserve, to withdraw their requests to pump groundwater and Pedernales River flows to serve the proposed project.

Statement of Bill Bunch, Executive Director and Attorney for Save Our Springs Alliance

“The science is overwhelming: the springs and waterfalls at Hamilton Pool, other springs and wells in the area, and the Pedernales River as it flows through Reimers Ranch Park will all be harmed by Mirasol’s proposed water pumping. That’s why the Travis County Commissioners Court and the professional staffs of the Hays Trinity and Southwest Travis County Groundwater Conservation Districts have joined with us in opposing Mirasol’s groundwater pumping permit requests.”

“It should be clear that there is simply not enough water to serve this massive project. Mr. Winn’s pledge to put more water into the system than is pumped out cannot be met. One of Texas’ most beloved natural wonders, Hamilton Pool, the Pedernales River, and three endangered native Texas species will all be harmed by the project as it is currently proposed. The law, the science and the law of good neighbors tell us that the project must be scaled back dramatically.”

“For over three decades, the citizens and leaders of Travis County have worked to preserve these special places along the Pedernales River. As Travis County Judge Andy Brown stated yesterday, taxpayers have invested \$180 million to buy a series of parks and conservation easements for the public along the Pedernales River Corridor. Now these investments in public parks and preserves for endangered species are threatened by the Winn family’s plans for an ultra-luxury resort that they call “green” and “sustainable.” It is not.’

“As proposed, the resort would include a hotel with 73 guest rooms 30 Branded Resort cottages, two restaurants, 41 Single-Family Residential Homesites, and other entertainment venues. It includes a small “farm-to-table” farm that is already being irrigated with groundwater, pumping that is already reducing spring flows in the area. And it would include a proposed University of Texas biological field station, part of a multi-million dollar gift the University. Unfortunately, this is a gift with strings attached, one that we ask both UT and the Winns to reconsider.”

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The developers say they will pump river water first, and only pump groundwater when necessary. But their river diversion permit is tied up at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. And the Winns are pushing forward first with groundwater pumping permit applications to both the Hays Trinity and Southwest Travis County Goundwater Conservation Districts. Their agricultural pumping, already underway, is exempt from regulation. The Winns propose to pump 96,000 gallons per day from the Pedernales River, which is already shrinking from prolonged drought and a heating climate. The developer seeks to pump the river down by almost four feet, reducing habitat and swimming areas in the river. This pumping would take place right where we know the recently listed federally endangered Texas Fatmucket freshwater mussel lives.

The developer is also asking for permits to pump over 75,000 gallons of groundwater per day when the river isn't flowing. This groundwater pumping – some of it already occurring from unregulated wells on the Mirasol Springs property –is directly impacting flows in area springs, including at Hamilton Pool.

Travis County, both of the local water conservation districts, and many of the project's neighbors oppose Mirasol's requested pumping permits because there is simply not enough water for the development, the parks, the rivers, neighbors existing wells, and the one-of-a-kind Roy Creek Canyon. The Mirasol property surrounds the Roy Creek Canyon preserve on three sides.

Statement of Nico Hauwert, Ph.D. an expert witness for Save our Springs

Jacob's Well in Wimberly is a good example of what happens when over pumping occurs. In recent years, the Jacobs Well spring has stopped flowing as a result of pumping for a nearby golf course development.

It's not just our parks that will be threatened. The springs around the Pedernales River support endangered species including the Golden-cheeked warbler, the proposed endangered Pedernales River springs salamander, and the recently listed Texas fat mucket freshwater mussel.

To make matters worse, the Mirasol development is also proposing to dispose of treated wastewater through land application on its development. Historically this type of treatment resulted in contamination of many Central Texans wells, springs and creeks. We think that this permit ought to be strengthened to require effluent to meet recreational water standards. A preliminary public hearing on this plan has been set before the State Office of Administrative Hearings on November 5.

We urge neighbors and recreational users of the river to attend.