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Dear GEAA members and friends,

I am passing on this message from GEAA member group, San Marcos River Foundation, as the news is very concerning.

Houston We Have a Problem:

Solid Rocket Motor Testing Over the Edwards Aquifer?????

We recently learned that Texas State University came to an agreement with X-Bow, a company working on improving rocket motor technology and manufacturing. The problem is that the University has agreed to allow this process to occur at the Freeman Ranch, which is very sensitive land over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone. [This information](#) comes to us right after the news that the University received approval from the Board of Regents to purchase the sensitive DuPont tract, which has karst features that are directly connected to Spring Lake through the San Marcos Springs. If Texas State University is willing to risk contamination of the Edwards Aquifer at the Freeman Ranch, what are they willing to do on the DuPont property?

Goal of the Freeman Ranch: "The main objectives in the management of the Freeman Center are to protect its ecosystems, enable research and educational opportunities within the Freeman Center, and provide access to the Center for service/outreach activities when appropriate."

Mission of the Freeman Ranch: "The Freeman Center provides 3,500 acres of Hill Country habitat and on-site facilities as part of Texas State University. The three-fold mission of research, education and outreach of the Center is enabled by a framework of foundation agreements with Texas State University, a doctoral-granting, emerging research institution dedicated to excellence in serving the research and education needs of Texas and the world beyond. Providing information that enables the good stewardship and sustainable use of Texas land and water resources is a core goal of the Center."

What does this mean? Solid Rocket Motor testing means that no rockets will be launched, but they'll be testing launches with everything secured to a concrete pad. The fuel is in solid pellet form, but if a launch doesn't go well these pellets can be thrown from the test site, which is where the concern comes in from a water quality perspective. Each of these pellets is basically rocket fuel and can explode if someone touches them or steps on them, posing a safety risk to humans and wildlife. Also, after each test the equipment must be cooled, using water to hose off the system. All this water has to be captured and hauled off, which leads us to believe that this process is not as benign as they'd like for us to think.

Why is this a problem? This location is 100% Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, so all stormwater runoff goes straight into our aquifer, which provides drinking water to over 2 million people in Central Texas, and from which springs like the San Marcos Springs emerge. Stormwater runoff takes any contaminants straight into the aquifer with no filtration, which is why we're concerned about water quality for both the aquifer and river.

What chemicals are possibly involved? Ammonium Perchlorate and Aluminum Oxide are two of the chemicals in the pellets that fuel the test launches. Both of these chemicals are very concerning with regards to water quality in the aquifer.

Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCW) Habitat: The Golden-cheeked Warbler is an endangered species, and its suitable habitat is shrinking as Central Texas grows and develops. The Freeman Ranch is excellent GCW habitat, and the University conducts research on the birds to learn more about their population and habits. It's such a prominent activity on the Freeman Ranch that there is a picture of the bird and a link to the research at the top of the Freeman Ranch page: <https://www.txst.edu/freemancenter/research.html#gcwar>. The GCW is very sensitive to disturbance during their nesting season, which is why many trails around San Marcos and Central Texas are closed during the months of March - July. [Here](#) is more information about the GCW from Texas A&M. [Here's a study](#) that the researchers at the Freeman Ranch published about the GCW.

Will launch testing be paused during nesting of the GCW??? We don't know. We're looking into this though.

Is there a TCEQ Water Quality Protection Abatement Plan (WPAP) or was that waived by TCEQ? We don't think so, which we honestly can't comprehend, but are confirming our suspicions and will let you know.

To say that we're horrified is an understatement. Why is the State of Texas more concerned with business deals, like AI Data Centers and Rocket Motor Testing above our drinking water? And during a drought no less!!!! If the chemicals associated with a rocket motor test site contaminate our aquifer, we can't get them out. There's no coming back from that. The risk just isn't worth it.

Is it too late to stop this deal from going forward?? Can they move this research and testing to a location that is not within Golden-cheeked Warbler habitat and not over the Edwards Aquifer? That would be prudent if it's not too late.

Information about possible chemicals associated with Rocket Launchers [click here](#).

SMRF's message is a reminder that sometimes even the best intended plans can go awry. That is why GEAA and our member groups are constantly keeping an eye on all aspects of protecting our aquifer. Kudos to the San Marcos River Foundation for the stellar work they are doing! You can go to the [SMRF website](#) and sign up to receive updates on the latest river news, upcoming volunteer opportunities, and events.

Annalisa Peace

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To learn more about the Edwards Aquifer visit [Under Our Feet](#).

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