



SOUTHERN EDWARDS AQUIFER PROJECT

Conserving and protecting life-giving waters

conservation profile

Ecoregion: Edwards Plateau.

Conservation Elements: Springs and seeps, riparian forests and floodplains, mesic canyon system, upland grasslands, savannas and shrublands, golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, Tobusch fishhook cactus, bracted twistflower, big red sage, Hill Country wild mercury, several endangered cave invertebrates, Texas and canyon mock-orange, Texas snowbells, Texas blind salamander, Texas blind catfish and others.

Stresses: Subdivision of ranches, unsustainable ground and surface water use, pollution, impervious cover from development, incompatible grazing practices and incompatible fire management.

Strategies: Promote voluntary conservation agreements over aquifer recharge and contributing zones, environmentally sensitive development, water conservation, rainwater harvesting and compatible land and wildlife management.

Partners: San Antonio Water System, Edwards Aquifer Authority, Environmental Defense, City of San Antonio, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Bat Conservation International, San Antonio River Authority, Nueces River Authority, Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, Bexar Land Trust, Cibolo Conservancy, Natural Area Preservation Association, Trust for Public Land, private landowners and other organizations and government agencies.



Medina River (© Lynn McBride)

Beneath portions of Central Texas flows a mighty underground river. Known as the Edwards Aquifer, its waters feed nearby springs, rivers and lakes and sustain diverse plant and animal life in this scenic region. In addition to supporting agricultural, industrial and recreational activities, the Edwards Aquifer is the primary source of drinking water for more than 1.7 million people in the southern Hill Country, including the entire city of San Antonio – the only large city in

America primarily dependent on an aquifer for municipal water.

Pristine springs dot the region, providing pure, reliable, constant-flowing water. Unique animals – such as aquatic salamanders and small aquatic invertebrates – have adapted to life within these springs.

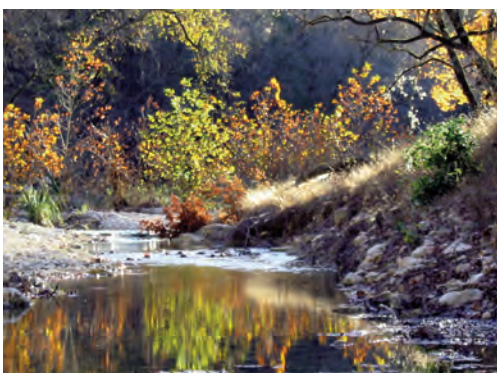
This region, however, faces increased threats, most notably from fast-paced development. Seven counties in the Texas Hill Country ranked among



Medina River (© Lynn McBride)

the top 100 fastest-growing counties in the United States between 1990 and 2000. As San Antonio and nearby Hill Country towns continue to grow, further increasing their dependence on this source of drinking water, protecting the aquifer becomes even more important. These waters also are central to the area's quality of life and economic vitality.

The Hill Country is experiencing a rapid loss of ranchlands, increased fragmentation of the landscape and rapid land-value appreciation. People are increasingly drawn to this beautiful but fragile landscape, but the rapid development of the area can negatively affect the health of the aquifer. The proliferation of septic systems in subdivisions, increased levels of contaminants



Love Creek (© Edward Porter)

and unsustainable water use by an expanding population are all threats to the health of the aquifer recharge zone.

Conserving the Edwards Aquifer

The Nature Conservancy recently led a group of organizations in a large-scale study to assess the Edwards Plateau Ecoregion, as scientists know it. Their assessment, based on extensive field work and geographic mapping, identified key threats and high-priority conservation sites within the Edwards Plateau. Their findings identified the Southern Edwards Aquifer region as one of those priority conservation sites because of the diverse array of species sustained by the aquifer and the threats they face. The region includes Bandera, Bexar, Comal, Edwards, Kendall, Kerr, Kinney, Medina, Real and Uvalde counties.

To address the permanent conservation of this natural treasure, the Conservancy launched the Southern Edwards Aquifer Project in cooperation with public and private

partners. The project encourages voluntary collaboration among private landowners, community leaders, government agencies, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations.

The aquifer project seeks to protect habitat and aquifer-sensitive lands while raising public awareness of the importance of conserving and protecting these waters. The overarching goal is to conserve the quality and quantity of the water by protecting the aquifer's recharge and contributing zones, while also conserving habitats for the native terrestrial and aquatic species of the Edwards Plateau.

The Southern Edwards Aquifer Project will implement a balanced and comprehensive land and water conservation program to protect aquifer water quality, the native species that depend on the aquifer and the economic value of the aquifer to the human community.

contact information

The Nature Conservancy of Texas
P.O. Box 1440
San Antonio, Texas 78295
tel (210) 224-8774
fax (210) 228-9805

nature.org/texas