

Aquifer Alliance helps varied groups learn intricacies of advocacy

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Courtesy photo

GEAA members perform cleanup duties in an area around Las Moras Springs in Brackettville.



How to help

Greater Edwards
Aquifer Alliance
P.O. Box 15618, San
Antonio, TX 78212
(210) 320-6294
www.aquiferalliance.org

[org](#)

The need: GEAA needs monetary donations to coordinate advocacy, educate the public and promote policies to protect the Edwards Aquifer.

The reports

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By [Eva Ruth Moravec](#) - Express-News

Staying abreast of who's doing what to which part of the Edwards Aquifer, which stretches from Mills County to the north to Edwards and Kinney counties in the south, is no small task.

There are 45 organizations, established by motivated citizens aquifer-wide, that each formed because of one hair-on-fire issue and now take it upon themselves to monitor a broader aspect of the aquifer that about 1.7 million residents depend on for drinking water.

These organizations — ranging from the highly organized Aquifer Guardians in Urban Areas that pays its own staff, to the Medina County Environmental Action Association, which formed after discussions over fences and at a local Dairy Queen — have one thing in common: They depend on the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance for support and leadership.

GEAA is one of many area nonprofit groups the San Antonio Express-News is profiling in its annual Grace of Giving series, which runs daily until Christmas.

“These groups have achieved some really amazing things,” said Annalisa Peace, executive director for GEAA. “It’s great to see these citizens be involved.”

As a karst aquifer, the Edwards Aquifer lacks a filtration system that most other aquifers enjoy, Peace said, so it’s more vulnerable to pollution. Basically, what goes into the aquifer over the recharge zone, an area around the now-densely developed northern portion of Loop 1604, is what comes out of our faucets.

Peace, a San Antonio native, was inspired to protect the aquifer one day while spelunking with her father and sister. Inside of one of the caves that line the aquifer, she says she saw a disposable diaper.

“People have no idea that the Edwards has no protection,” she said. “Our region has been blessed with one of the cleanest and most bountiful water supplies in the whole world. It replenishes itself very quickly, but it also gets polluted very quickly, and we have to work very hard to make sure it’s good, high-quality water.”

Since 2002, GEAA has been educating San Antonians on what they can do to keep the city’s drinking water clean. The agency takes local students to various parts of the aquifer on educational field trips, conducts research and maps the areas’ plant and animal species, creates legislative agendas to advise lawmakers, holds teacher in-service programs for continuing education credits, maps the aquifer’s geological characteristics and supports its member groups.

In late 1999, Dr. Bob Fitzgerald learned from his precinct commissioner that an aggregate company wanted to open a quarry over the Edwards Aquifer in Quihi, a city in Medina County, west of San Antonio. Another neighbor heard at the local Dairy Queen that the company also had plans to build a 10-mile railroad through the town. Fitzgerald was so incensed he called for a neighborhood meeting, which 65 others attended in his living room.

“We were on our own,” Fitzgerald said. “But because of our concern of the aquifer, we learned about GEAA and attended some of their meetings.”

He said he knew little about fighting a company that wanted to mine into the Edwards Aquifer and even less about stopping a company from building a railroad line, but to date, neither has materialized. Fitzgerald’s group, the Medina County Environmental Action Association, now has 350 members.

"I've learned a lot, and I think we really need to pay attention to our water sources and how to protect them," said the 78-year-old retired neurological surgeon and member of the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature. "The GEAA has been a vital source in our education and improving our knowledge, and in contacting sympathetic legislators