

**August 4, 2011**  
**For Immediate Release**

### **Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance Supports Fees to Maintain Springflow and Protect Water Quality**

A **Public meeting** will be held in San Antonio on Thursday, August 11th to inform and take public comment on proposed increases in Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) pumping fees. The large part of this fee increase will be used to fund the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program's (EARIP) plan to preserve Edwards Aquifer spring flows. The EAA also plans to use a small part of the fee increase to fund a water quality program that would include inspection of permanent stormwater BMP's and sewer lines on the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, and other other measures required by the urbanization of this region. Legislation that would have allowed the EAA to support this program through fees to developers failed during the 82<sup>nd</sup> session.

The Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and our fifty member organizations, as participating stakeholders in the EARIP, support the increase in Aquifer Management Fees proposed to fund the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP). This plan has been four years in the making and deserves to be funded at levels adequate to insure success. What is at stake here is fair and rational allocation of water from the Edwards Aquifer. Since the Endangered Species Act is the only tool that the Federal government gives us to deal with these issues, the critters will continue to assume a starring role in these discussions. The crux of the issues addressed by the EARIP, however, is whether municipal and industrial pumping should be allowed to draw down the aquifer below levels required for maintaining spring flow. To do so could result in reduction of in-stream flows needed to maintain the balance of fresh and saline water in the bays and estuaries, as well as the need for hundreds of families on Edwards wells to drill deeper, loss of heritage trees, and perhaps other unanticipated consequences.

The EARIP process has forced all stakeholders to realize that we need to conserve and diversify our water resources. The plan promotes conservation measures for all utilities and private well owners throughout the region that will result in thousands of acre feet staying in the aquifer rather than being wasted through outdated water use practices and leaky distribution systems. Funds generated by the increased management fees would be used to implement, among other things, region wide water conservation programs, additional measures to protect water quality and - most importantly - enlarging San Antonio's capacity to capture water during wet years in the SAWS Aquifer Storage and Recovery project for use in times of drought. The other option to this plan would be to drastically restrict pumping from the Edwards Aquifer during times of drought.

**Our staff has researched water rates and have concluded that SAWS, Bexar Met, and New Braunfels Utilities, when compared to other US cities of comparable size, definitely have room to charge more for water, especially if increased fees are structured so as to distribute the price increases to discourage excess consumption. For SAWS, specifically, we found that when compared to rates for similar cities in the US, SAWS water rates are extremely low. To see the full study, [click here](http://troxiamo.com/images/Water%20Utility%20Rates%20Study.pdf). ( <http://troxiamo.com/images/Water%20Utility%20Rates%20Study.pdf> )**

GEAA also fully supports the increase in EAA management fees proposed to fund a proposed water quality program. As State designated stewards of the Edwards Aquifer, the EAA is the appropriate agency to implement and enforce measures to protect water quality. We applaud the EAA board and staff for moving forward with this program.

Please note that increased fees will not affect agricultural users as their fees are capped by State Law. Nor would the fees apply to well owners who pump water strictly for domestic and livestock use, as these pumpers are exempt. The increase in management fees would principally be passed on to the municipal utilities that pump from the Edwards.

The Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance unites fifty member organizations from throughout twenty-one counties behind a comprehensive plan to protect regional karst aquifers, their springs and watersheds, and the Texas Hill Country. For more information visit [www.AquiferAlliance.org](http://www.AquiferAlliance.org)