

Dear GEAA members and friends,

[Public meetings](#) will be held throughout the Edwards Region next week to inform and take public comment on proposed increases in Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) pumping fees. **We urge you to come out and speak in support of the increase in Aquifer Management Fees proposed to fund the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP).** The EARIP plan to preserve Edwards Aquifer spring flows has been three 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 folks 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the region that will result in thousands of acre feet staying in the aquifer rather than being wasted through outdated water use practices and leaky distribution systems.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.**

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 large municipal utilities that pump from the Edwards.

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](#).

We hope to see you at one of the Public Hearings listed below.

Annalisa Peace
Executive Director
Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance

EDWARDS AQUIFER AUTHORITY HOSTS PUBLIC MEETINGS ON POTENTIAL INCREASE TO AQUIFER MANAGEMENT FEES

The Edwards Aquifer Authority (Authority) will hold public meetings for the purpose of presenting information and receiving public comment on a potential increase in the aquifer management fees of the Authority for fiscal year 2012 to be assessed on holders of Edwards Aquifer municipal and industrial groundwater withdrawal permits. These public meetings are scheduled as follows.

Monday, August 1, 2011

6:00 pm
Willie De Leon Civic Center, Reading Room
300 E. Main Street
Uvalde, TX 78801

Tuesday, August 2, 2011

6:00 pm
Braden Keller Community Center
1410 Amelia Street
Castroville, TX 78009

Thursday, August 4, 2011

6:00 pm
NBU Service Center
355 FM 306
New Braunfels, TX 78130

Wednesday, August 10, 2011

6:00 pm
San Marcos Activity Center
501 E. Hopkins
San Marcos, TX 78666

Thursday, August 11, 2011

6:00 pm
Edwards Aquifer Authority, Conference Center
1615 N. St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, TX 78215
Reason for the Public Meetings:

The purpose of these public meetings is to inform the public of the likely significant increase to municipal and industrial Edwards Aquifer groundwater withdrawal aquifer management fees beginning January 2012. The fee increase is due largely to anticipated costs associated with the implementation of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), as expected to be recommended by the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP), to preserve the natural habitats of certain aquifer-dependent threatened and endangered species as required by state law (the Edwards Aquifer Authority Act) and the federal Endangered Species Act. A much smaller increase is also needed for the financial restructuring necessary for the continuance of a significant component of the Authority's water conservation efforts, the aquifer management fee rebate program, as well as an enhanced water quality program.

The Authority anticipates the HCP will be recommended by the EARIP for implementation by the Authority and other stakeholders beginning in 2013. The EARIP, a stakeholder group representing the region's diverse interests, was created by the Texas Legislature in 2007 with a mandate to undertake a consensus-driven process to identify necessary measures to benefit the protected federally-listed species associated with the Aquifer, specifically those within the Comal and San Marcos springs ecosystems, and to recommend a plan of action that would be acceptable to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and result in the issuance of an incidental take permit. The HCP, under development for the past four years, will be completed

and submitted to USFWS for approval in the fall 2011. Approval by USFWS would result in the issuance of an incidental take permit and would require the HCP to be implemented beginning January 1, 2013, and continuing through at least 2028. This would also require the Authority to begin collecting increased aquifer management fees in 2012 in an amount sufficient to cover the initial associated costs.

Additional funding is also required to continue the Authority's aquifer management fee rebate program started in 2006, which is designed to encourage water conservation from the Edwards Aquifer by incentivizing permit holders to withdraw less water from the Aquifer in exchange for a rebate of previously paid annual aquifer management fees. An increase in aquifer management fees is necessary to ensure the future sustainability of the rebate program. Finally, the Authority is also considering an enhanced water quality program.

The Authority is limited to funding all its administrative expenses and programs through aquifer management fees assessed on all users of the Edwards Aquifer who have a groundwater withdrawal permit issued by the Authority. These users include irrigation, municipal, and industrial users. However, state law limits the amount that can be assessed on irrigation users to \$2.00 per acre-foot of water actually used. Aquifer management fee rates for non-irrigation users are set by the Board of Directors (Board) of the Edwards Aquifer Authority through the adoption of an annual operating budget each November. The Board will not propose an aquifer management fee rate or operating budget for fiscal year 2012 until October 2011. However, the Authority is holding these public meetings now in order to solicit public comment and provide the parties who will be directly affected with sufficient information to plan for and budget accordingly for the anticipated fee increase.

Public comments can be presented orally or submitted in writing during any public hearing.