

## Time for outfitters to show some appreciation for rivers - Herald-Zeitung Online: Guest Columns

# Time for outfitters to show some appreciation for rivers

By Cheryl Gilpin Guest columnist | Posted: Friday, September 23, 2011 12:00 am

I care very much about the Comal River, and the people who live on the River and the businesses that provide a tourism base to our economy. But I wish they were all working together instead of fighting each other.

We all have a serious common threat to tourism and Comal River water quality, and that is the over-pumping of the Edwards Aquifer — mostly by people who live outside of New Braunfels. City council needs to have more citizens and tourism businesses providing them with objections to a plan that will cause much lower flows.

The stakeholder Habitat Conservation Plan is to minimize flows in the Comal to at least 90 percent less flow during critical periods before doing much to reduce pumping. Such low flows will cause much worse health conditions. If council signs the Habitat Conservation Plan agreement the way the pumpers have it set up, that will leave taxpayers paying to clean up the mess in the Comal and agreeing not to hold the region's pumpers accountable if they are following a plan that doesn't even come close to protecting the Comal's flows.

The plan actually offers little protection for critters and lots of protection for pumpers. This is about causing your property tax to increase. When the Comal has at least 90 percent less flow, how bad will the water quality be then? How will we pay for cleaning that up?

It will have to be cleaned up. But councilors may be agreeing that it will be the citizens' responsibility — not the region's pumpers — if they sign the agreement the way it is now. At 90 percent less flow, we will have no tubing or recreation but will still have huge water quality problems. More sewer pipes could be breaking and leaking underground and flowing down to the Comal River.

"Comal" is a Spanish word for bowl. That is exactly how our Comal Watershed is shaped within New Braunfels. At 90 percent less flow, it won't be flushing contaminants out very well.

Tubing businesses are saying they can solve the water quality problems without the city telling them what to do, but why haven't they done so?

Why don't they lease parts of private lands with access to the river and install real bathrooms with flush potties and pay the city to increase their sewage capacity to accommodate tens of thousands more flushes. Tubing businesses want free enterprise, but they want to be free to inflict economic hardship and water quality problems on others.

Business operating under free enterprise cannot be sustainable without some consideration of others because we are all in this together. The ones who profit from tubing should not expect citizens to pay for the difficulties caused by their clients.

Why aren't they making tubers leave a deposit to be refunded when they bring back at least as many bottles as they take into the river when they get in their tube plus a bonus for extra bottles?

Instead of a petition, they could actually demonstrate taking care of the problem and then ask for the ban to be repealed after showing sincere commitment and good faith in doing so.

It seems tubing businesses have a deterioration of their public image. They could help their business do better by worrying more about that image than worrying about being told what to do by city council. Their image would be much improved if they put their money into showing appreciation for the Comal and Guadalupe rivers, the health of their clients and those who own property on these rivers while their clients tube, instead of putting so much money into humiliating the attempts of the people trying to do something about the problems after the tubing businesses have neglected to do so.

I heard some of the tubing businesses say the people who live on the rivers and the taxpayers of New Braunfels are closed minded. It's just that they are fed up from having their concerns ignored for so long.

I am really tired of this fight. The "Can the Ban" crowd should realize a lot of people in New Braunfels are really not going to appreciate the tubing businesses until they actually put their money where their mouth is and show a little more appreciation for the Comal and the people of New Braunfels.

I hope they rise to the occasion and do this because we all need each other in this town, and I appreciate that they do bring benefits to our town.

- Cheryl Gilpin is a former Edwards Aquifer Authority director elected from New Braunfels.