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"We put the Edwards Aquifer on the map!!"

Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance Releases Aquifer Conservation Map;
Announces Challenge Grant from George P. Mitchell

**Press Conferences to be held on Wednesday in Austin, San Marcos
and San Antonio**

This Wednesday at press conferences in Austin, San Marcos, and San Antonio, the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance will release its first major education publication – the Edwards Aquifer Map and Conservation Guide.

The 2-foot by 3-foot, double-sided full color map and eco-tour guide to the "Hidden Heart of Texas," the Edwards Aquifer Ecosystem, is an introduction to the most valuable, vulnerable, biologically diverse, and mysterious water body in the State of Texas. The map guide is also a call to all concerned citizens, and public and private decision-makers, to take immediate action to save the Edwards Aquifer and its Hill Country watersheds from pollution and over-pumping.

The Edwards Aquifer Map and Conservation Guide also introduces the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (G.E.A.A.) as a working coalition of citizen based non-profit organizations who had historically worked separately in local watersheds but realized the need to link together and work regionally to advocate for conservation of the entire Edwards Aquifer Ecosystem, from Salado in the northeast to Del Rio in the southwest.

The Edwards Aquifer and its contributing watersheds, when combined with the middle portion of the Colorado River basin, makes up the bulk of the beloved Texas Hill Country. The Edwards Aquifer is the sole source of drinking water for over 1.5 million Texans and is home to over 60 species that live here and nowhere else on earth. Many of these species are listed as "endangered" by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and face high risks of near-term extinction.

The founding G.E.A.A. members are Aquifer Guardians in Urban Areas (AGUA), Smart Growth San Antonio, Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, Save Our Springs Alliance, San Marcos River Foundation, San Antonio and Austin regional Sierra Clubs, and Hays Community Action Network.

G.E.A.A. groups have received a three-year challenge grant from Houston geologist, developer and philanthropist George P. Mitchell, founder of Mitchell Energy and Development, totaling \$500,000 per year. The challenge grant funds G.E.A.A. member groups and their work with students and faculty at central Texas institutions of higher learning, with citizens and private businesses, and with scientists and other professionals committed to sustainable land and water use practices in the Edwards Aquifer region.

The Edwards Aquifer Map and Conservation Guide, which is available for viewing and purchase at the G.E.A.A. website - www.greateredwards.org - provides the geographic, economic, and scientific framework for all of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance's work.

The Mitchell challenge grant jumpstarted GEAA's efforts, which first began in the summer of 2002. The work funded by the grant was, in turn, inspired by the late Ian McHargue, an architect whose book "Design with Nature" remains the seminal guide to environmentally sound development practices. Before his death, Mr. McHargue was a personal friend and consultant to Mr. Mitchell.

"Given the rapid growth in the Austin/San Antonio corridor, I believe a strong case can be made for a major conservation commitment," says George P. Mitchell. "I'm also familiar with the way karst limestone aquifers like the Edwards are uniquely vulnerable to pollution and excessive pumping from urban development and agricultural activities."

"The threats to the Edwards Aquifer have never been bigger, but with Mr. Mitchell's generous challenge grant, we have a great start to building regional and statewide support for saving the heart of Texas," said Bill Bunch, executive director of Save Our Springs Alliance. "However, in order to truly succeed, we need every individual, corporation, and organization who cares about protecting the Aquifer and its scenic Hill Country watersheds to respond to this challenge and get involved."

With the release of the Edwards Aquifer Map and Conservation Guide, we invite every single person to join us in saving the heart of Texas.