

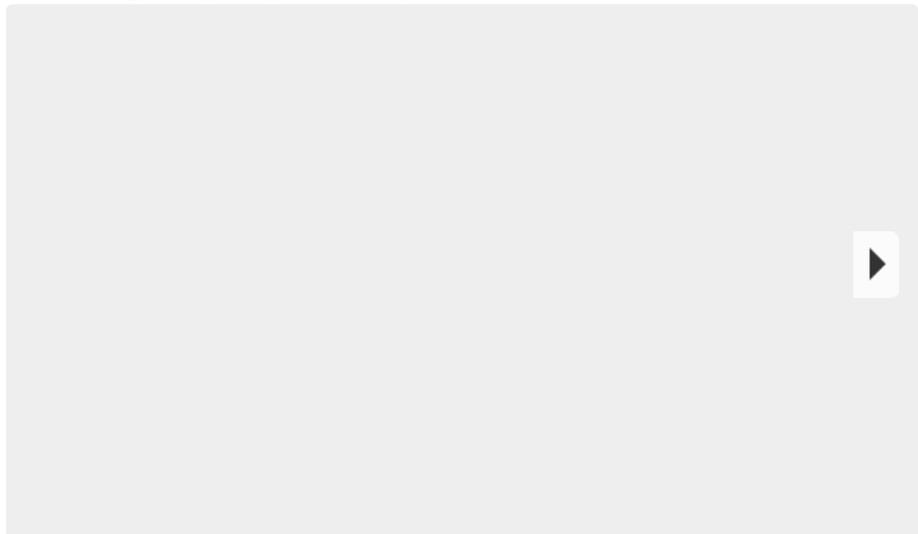
Environmental groups want SAWS to deny service to subdivision

BY COLIN MCDONALD : JULY 2, 2013 : Updated: July 3, 2013 12:08am

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San Antonio is hiring experts to study whether the 600-acre buffer around the Bracken Bat Cave is large enough, in light of a developer's

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The Bracken Bat Cave near San Antonio hosts millions of bats. Billy Calzada / San Antonio Express-News



plan to build on the neighboring 1,500 acres, City Manager **Sheryl Sculley** said Tuesday.

If built, the subdivision would be directly under the main flight path of the 10 million to 20 million bats that emerge from the cave in southern Comal County to feed every summer night.

Various groups are working to protect the cave from possible encroachment and recently met with the developer, Galo Properties, to see what, if any,

accommodation can be made for what is home to the largest bat colony in the world.

“We can influence through persuasion but have no direct veto power on development,” Sculley said of the city’s role.

That didn’t stop two environmental groups from asking the board of the **San Antonio Water System** on Tuesday to reverse its decision to provide water and sewer service to the subdivision, which would be in Comal County and could have up to 3,500 homes over the recharge zone of the **Edwards Aquifer**, the city’s main drinking water source.

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SAWS has a choice when it comes to providing water and sewer service, said members of the **Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance**, and it should choose not to enable a development that could support a population the size of Alamo Heights in such an environmentally sensitive area.

Since the debate over the subdivision, called Crescent Hills, began several months ago, SAWS has maintained it must provide service because the development would be in the area the **Texas Commission on Environmental Quality** designates that it serve.

"What they neglect to mention is that TCEQ only requires this because SAWS asked to be the sole service provider," said **Annalisa Peace**, executive director of GEAA.

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Peace said the **SAWS board** can apply to decertify part of the service area that is over the recharge and contributing zones of the aquifer in Bexar County and all of its service area in Comal County.

That way, SAWS would not be obligated to serve every development and would have room to negotiate, she said.

According to TCEQ, SAWS can apply to shrink its service area in a similar way that it applied to expand it.

SAWS said it took more than five years to get the certification to be the sole service provider for the area that includes Crescent Hills.

No one could remember a time when it requested to shrink the utility's service area. It would be especially difficult, and possibly expensive, now that SAWS has committed to Galo Properties to provide service, said **Greg Flores**, a SAWS spokesman.

In May, Gene Dawson of Pape-Dawson Engineers, which was hired to design the development, said Galo could save more than \$3 million if it didn't have to go through SAWS and the development's start-up costs would be less.

"The developer's life would be much easier if the city of San Antonio and SAWS would just get out of the way," he said in an email.

GEAA, Peace said, would prefer the subdivision use individual septic tanks, and therefore have fewer houses, than to have SAWS build more than 10 miles of pressurized sewer line over the recharge zone to reach the property. Some of that line that would go under Cibolo Creek, one of the largest recharge features of the aquifer.

"This is insanity," Peggy Day, a member of the **Alamo Group of the Sierra Club**, told the SAWS board about building sewer lines along creek beds. "We already know that all sewer lines eventually leak."

Sewer lines for Crescent Hills would facilitate even more development over the recharge zone, another bad planning outcome, Peace said.

This summer, the SAWS board will review its growth policy at its regular retreat, board member **Samuel Luna** said. The current boundary follows the San Antonio Extraterritorial Jurisdiction, which generally extends five miles beyond the city limits.

Luna said he'll advocate for SAWS to not allow its service area to extend beyond Bexar County. He has asked the City Council to overturn the decision by the SAWS board to provide service to Crescent Hills.

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