

Protect bats and the aquifer

ANNALISA PEACE, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS : JULY 5, 2013

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Thousands of citizens of Comal and Bexar counties, as well as bat fans worldwide, oppose the Crescent Hills development in Comal

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Annalisa Peace is executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance.

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County.

We have been gratified to read articles and columns in the San Antonio Express-News reporting on this issue and on the progress of negotiations for the purchase of the Crescent Hills land. The members of the Greater **Edwards Aquifer** Alliance, or GEAA, would like nothing better than to see this land preserved in its natural state in perpetuity.

Our main concerns, however, have yet to be addressed by any elected officials. At a May 29 City Council meeting, most speakers opposing Crescent Hills spoke against locating this development on the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, as well as expressing support for protecting Bracken Bat Preserve.

Like the bats of Bracken, the Edwards Aquifer is an elegant natural phenomenon that provides incomparable and irreplaceable services to the denizens of our region. Our aquifer is a unique karst ecosystem that provides a clean and abundant water supply to 2.1 million Texans. It is the source of the largest springs in Texas and generates millions of dollars annually for recreational businesses in New Braunfels and San Marcos.

The Edwards Aquifer is due all the protection that we can offer in policy and regulation. GEAA will continue to protest **San Antonio Water System** service to new developments on the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, regardless of the outcome in the Crescent Hills case.

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GEAA is particularly concerned with the extension of sewer mains to be installed within creek beds that recharge up to 80 percent of the water that we drink. Given that these lines will require special inspection and maintenance and threaten to pollute our groundwater, springs and rivers as this

infrastructure ages, we oppose SAWS contracts for sewer service to undeveloped portions of the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone.

SAWS has been disingenuous in its statements regarding its inability to deny service to Crescent Hills and other developments. Spokespeople for SAWS have repeatedly said the state, under the authority of the **Texas Commission on Environmental Quality**, requires them to provide service to this area. What they neglect to mention is that TCEQ only requires this because SAWS asked to be the sole service provider. Our lawyers and TCEQ staff have assured me that this could easily be remedied with a simple action from SAWS.

On July 2, GEAA and others went to the **SAWS board** meeting to request that SAWS apply to TCEQ to amend permits that designate SAWS as the sole service provider for water and sewer service. We asked that SAWS apply to TCEQ to decertify portions of the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone in Bexar and all of Comal County. This action merely involves SAWS submitting this request to TCEQ by filling out a form created for that purpose. Once this is accomplished, SAWS will be free to deny service, as it has done in the past, to projects that are incompatible with aquifer protection.

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In a nutshell, we do not want SAWS installing additional sewage infrastructure within the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, and we do not want to pay for securing additional water supplies that will be used to serve new development on the recharge zone. Thanks to the bats of Bracken, attention has been focused on the consequences of land uses incompatible with preserving the natural resources that make our region a uniquely wonderful place to live.

We ask only that the Edwards Aquifer be afforded the same concern and protection as the bats.