



Contact: Nathan Pence, Executive Director-Habitat Conservation Program
210-222-2204
(cell) 210-316-2106
npence@edwardsaquifer.org

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**Drought Causes Edwards Aquifer Region's Habitat Conservation Plan to Trigger
"Biological Monitoring Plan"**

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) staff and consultants have stepped up field evaluations of endangered species and their habitats due to drought-caused conditions at the Comal Springs. As part of the HCP's biological monitoring plan, the health of the springs ecosystem will now be analyzed every two weeks rather than the typical program practice of two studies per year.

"With the implementation of HCP programs in 2013, the Edwards Aquifer, spring flows, endangered species and their habitats have a fighting chance to weather this current drought," stated Tom Taggart, HCP Implementing Committee chairman. "The HCP regional stakeholder efforts are designed to strike the right balance in environmental and human needs while preserving the Edwards Aquifer as a resource."

A typical biological monitoring effort includes a detailed evaluation of water quality and overall health of the various protected species and their habitats. The trigger levels for additional monitoring were chosen based on the available data suggesting when significant changes to habitat quality or availability may impact species.

"While droughts are tough to deal with on many levels, we do learn a great deal about how we can protect the Edwards Aquifer as a resource as we conduct research in these fortunately rare extended dry conditions," said Nathan Pence, HCP Program Manager. "The weather is constantly changing, but we can control how we prepare for droughts, and that's what the HCP is all about."

The current biological monitoring plan components include:

- Aquatic vegetation mapping for select river reaches
- Fountain darter sampling (drop nets, dip nets, visual)
- San Marcos salamander sampling (SCUBA and snorkel)
- Texas wild-rice physical observations and annual mapping
- Comal Springs riffle beetle monitoring
- Comal invertebrate sampling (drift net sampling over spring orifices)
- Comal Springs salamander sampling
- Parasite evaluations concerning the fountain darter
- Ramshorn and other exotic snail monitoring

The Edwards Aquifer is a unique groundwater resource and primary source of water for more than 2 million people in Uvalde, Medina, Bexar, Comal and Hays Counties, supporting domestic, industrial and agricultural water

needs. The Edwards Aquifer is also the source of the only two major springs remaining in Texas - the San Marcos and the Comal. These springs feed the San Marcos and Comal Rivers, which are tributaries to the Guadalupe River. The Habitat Conservation Plan was developed to protect and preserve this vital water resource. You can read more about the HCP at www.eahcp.org.

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