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**DATE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Edwards Aquifer Region's Habitat Conservation Plan Designed to Ease Drought Effects**

Endangered species and their habitats in the Edwards Aquifer region have a fighting chance to weather the historic drought gripping the state thanks to innovative environmental programs set in motion in 2012 through a regional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

In late 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service brought together stakeholders from throughout the Edwards Region to develop a plan to protect federally listed endangered species dependent on the Edwards Aquifer. The plan was approved in 2012, and program implementation quickly followed.

"This was a long and intense process that regional entities went through to develop what is known as the Habitat Conservation Plan," said HCP Implementing Committee Chairman Tom Taggart. "Stakeholders developed many different components to help protect the Edwards Aquifer during critical periods. Our overall efforts were designed to maintain spring flows, make sure all water users have adequate water supplies and reduce impacts to endangered species and their habitats."

Some of the major HCP initiatives include:

**Regional Municipal Water Conservation Program** - The goal of the program is to conserve 10,000 acre-feet of permitted or exempt Edwards Aquifer withdrawals. Currently, 8,400 acre-feet of water have been enrolled in the program, with communities such as Uvalde and Universal City participating.

**Voluntary Irrigation Suspension Program (VISPO)** - The VISPO is a voluntary program open to eligible holders of irrigation water rights from the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) in Atascosa, Bexar, Comal, Hays, Medina and Uvalde counties who are willing to not pump authorized withdrawal rights in exchange for financial payments. More than 24,000 acre-feet of water have been committed to VISPO by the agriculture community.

**ASR Leasing Program** - The Aquifer Storage and Recovery Leasing Program leases water from Edwards permit holders so it can be stored in San Antonio Water System's Aquifer Storage and Recovery facility in south Bexar County. Edwards water is stored underground for use during extremely dry periods. When stored water is used, SAWS reduces its active pumping from Edwards wells helping to preserve flows at the Comal and San Marcos Springs.

**Critical Period Management and Stage V** - Under Stage V emergency rules, the Edwards Aquifer permit holders are required to reduce water use from the Edwards by 44 percent. This measure is currently implemented in the Uvalde Pool of the Edwards Aquifer. The San Antonio pool is now in Stage III critical period reductions of 30 percent.

**Habitat Protection Measures** - There are 10 different habitat protection programs outlined for Comal Springs. Some measures include: aquatic vegetation restoration, decaying vegetation removal, old channel restoration and non-native species animal control. In San Marcos, 16 different environmental plans are being implemented that include: sediment removal, surface water diversions, bank stabilization and native riparian restoration.

"The HCP programs are ways for the Edwards Region to be ready for extended dry periods, so we can minimize adverse impacts to the Edwards Aquifer water levels, spring flows and endangered species," HCP Program Manager Nathan Pence stated. "Everyone has a stake in this program succeeding, and we've seen great collaboration on all aspects of program implementation."

Pence pointed out that residents and businesses also have beneficial effects on the Edwards when adopting sound water conservation habits. He encouraged people to find and repair water leaks, retrofit homes and businesses with low-flow fixtures, and being very careful not to overwater landscapes.

During critical periods, each water entity will have strict outdoor watering guidelines. You can check your water supplier's website for important water-saving information.

————— **HCP** —————

*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 Hayes Counties. 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](http://www.eahcp.org).*