



Contact: Nathan Pence  
npence@edwardsaquifer.org  
210-477-8527  
Cell - 210-316-2106

**May 12, 2014**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Drought Causes Edwards Aquifer Region's Habitat Conservation Plan to Trigger "Provision M"**

*All work being done around Comal and San Marcos Springs is stopped for Fish and Wildlife review*

This is the fourth year in a row of drought conditions in South Texas, and the Comal Springs in New Braunfels and the San Marcos Springs in San Marcos are already starting to show signs of low flows before hotter and drier summer weather begins. In response to low spring flows, the Edwards Aquifer Region's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) triggered "Provision M," which is one of many endangered species and springflow protection measures in the HCP.

When the Comal Springs reaches 130 cubic feet per second (cfs) and/or the San Marcos Springs reaches 120 cfs, Provision M requires that work being done around the springs stop so HCP and federal Fish and Wildlife officials can ensure no damage is being done to endangered species or their habitats under low-flow conditions.

With one cubic foot of water equaling 7.48 gallons, water flowing at 130 cfs equates to roughly 972 gallons per second.

"While we can't control the weather, we can control how we prepare for these extremely dry periods, and that's what the HCP is all about," said Nathan Pence, HCP program manager. "We know the springs lose flow and water levels across the Edwards Aquifer can drop significantly during prolonged droughts. The good news is that the region has done a very good job of coming together to help us minimize impacts as much as possible."

Once the federal review is complete, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife can issue a waiver so all or parts of the HCP program can continue. Current HCP work includes a:

- flow-split construction project designed to keep water in the Comal Springs old channel where most of the endangered species and habitats flourish
- sediment removal program to take out excess erosion materials that could cover up habitats in Comal and San Marcos Springs
- vegetation restoration efforts to remove exotic vegetation and replace with native vegetation that represents prime habitat for the species during low flows in Comal and San Marcos Springs

"Due to the HCP programs implemented in 2012, the Edwards Aquifer, springflows, endangered species and their habitats have a fighting chance to weather this current drought," Pence stated. "Overall, the HCP regional stakeholder efforts are designed to strike the right balance in protecting spring flows, ensuring all water users have the water they need each day and protecting the Edwards Aquifer as a resource."

The drought of record occurred over a period of six years in the 1950s when the Edwards Aquifer levels reached all-time lows and the springs in Comal County stopped flowing for about

six months. The San Marcos Springs have never gone dry. However, the Edwards Region is five times more populated than it was in the 1950s, and scientists also know that another drought of record will happen at some point in the future.

“While there are many more people now living in the eight-county Edwards Aquifer Region, researchers also have learned much more about how to manage the Edwards Aquifer as well,” Pence explained. “Through the HCP program, water entities are investing \$17 million to \$20 million per year in various water-saving and species-habitat preserving programs to help address the difficult weather conditions.”

In addition to new science being applied to Edwards Aquifer protection, all water entities agree that residents and businesses should increase their water conservation awareness and efforts. Fixing all water leaks, minimally watering landscapes and reducing indoor water use through shorter showers and washing only full loads are the best ways each person can contribute to preserving the Edwards Aquifer, which is the primary water source for the region’s two million people.

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### HCP

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*The Edwards Aquifer is a unique groundwater resource, extending 180 miles from Brackettville in Kinney County to Kyle in Hays County. It is the primary source of drinking water for more than 2 million people in south central Texas and serves the domestic, agricultural, industrial and recreational needs of the area. The Edwards Aquifer is 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).*