Issues involving growth in the Edwards Aquifer dependant region and possible mitigation initiatives

As we labor to create a better future through engineered or active management activities designed to provide water to the species when they need it most, or reduce the risk of stressing the endangered species there is another area of investigation we must not leave behind. The strategies we are exploring are correctly employed as bridges to a more sustainable water supply solution in the future.

The 572,000 acre feet available under Senate Bill 3 are a marked increase from the amounts originally contemplated by the EAA act which were to be below 400,000. The change was made by the region cooperatively to avoid a cost we all believe reflected a poor value. The majority of stakeholders and legislature embraced this practical solution in SB3.

However, it should be remembered that the permitting system through the EAA is based on historical usage of the aquifer though periods with very different populations, agricultural, industrial and municipal needs. The tools we develop and employ to help protect the species, will not function as well or at all when withdrawals to face 2050 demands are being made.

Regional Water Planning efforts are underway across the state to identify solutions to future water needs. Our region is actively involved. However, at least one of the major supply strategies for SAWS has been compromised and shelved by the agency originally proposed to supply the water (LCRA 150,000 AF). This failed strategy replaced another major project that was abandoned by SAWS At our meeting 9/9 and 9/10/10, SAWS presented information that the strides since 2006 in acquiring Edward Aquifer permit rights and the great success in using their rights to store water in the ASR project, now at 82,000 AF stored and climbing means they are secure until about 2034 even including growth projections. This new information modifies the management plan from 2009 that showed shortages possible in 2014 under drought conditions. This news is welcome. It does not provide a 50 year future security sought in state planning but is a significant improvement that if accurate will buy additional time to work on future supplies. However, it has again increased San Antonio's reliance on the Edwards for supply in the interim be it direct or through ASR storage. The tools we develop in EARIP are not water supply tools but species protection tools.

Program packages we develop for input to the HCP will be vetted through the NEPA and ESA requirements to be approved and incorporated into the plan allowing issuance of the incidental take permit. The cumulative effects analysis must consider the fact that growth is reasonably expected to occur in evaluation of programs. The current State planning projections call for the area using the Edwards as water supply to nearly triple in population during the next fifty years. All our analysis is based on the maximum use of 572,000 AF and no quantity beyond that.

No amount above that could be used by permit holders without exceeding and perhaps invalidating the boundaries we have studied and the Science Subcommittee and consultants have analyzed. Karl Dreher's presentation at the meeting on the "Built in Conservatism" created by the CPM methodologies vs. the permit cap as reflected in actual pumpages, reflects the realities of the limits we create in

regulating the aquifer. To create conditions that will increase reliance on the Edwards for future water supply growth would erode such "planned" conservatism which was meant to protect the species while allowing flexibility for use in wet periods of plentiful water availability.

For the investment in species protection projects to be justified and sustainable and a bridge to more secure future conditions, there are a number of items we may chose to include in any program packages we develop. These may include:

A. A "diversification target" should be developed for all municipal water supplies which would quantify supply for future growth from non-Edwards sources. This target would be reflected in the WUG plans to meet future supply needs in the Region L process. Such needed amounts could be net savings from conservation of existing demands. Accomplishment of targets could be included in HCP as a parameter.
B. If Edwards water is acquired or converted from AG use to Municipal use it could be coupled with a diversification ratio requirement. E.G. if 10,000 AF is converted then 20,000 AF of non – Edwards water would need to be brought online contemporaneously as a condition of conversion.
C. EARIP could support the EAA in expedited completion in implementation of the existing EAA strategic plan by implementing a ban on withdrawal point transfers from Uvalde pool to San Antonio pool. The "first phase" of the plan has been implemented by banning withdrawal point transfers across the Cibolo Creek. Interim transfers could still be allowed for a time with the appropriate 2/1 ratio from the EAA staff study. Existing lease arrangements should be honored throughout their current term. This could be evaluated versus B above or in combination with it.
D. Recommendation to EAA in support of enforcement of non-permitted wells in Bexar and other counties as has commenced in Hays County throughout the balance of the EAA jurisdiction.