

## **Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan: Conservation Planning Assistance Grant**

### **Project Abstract Summary:**

The Edwards Aquifer is located along the Balcones Fault Zone in South-Central Texas and is one of the most productive aquifers in the United States. This karst aquifer is characterized by the presence of sinkholes, sinking streams, caves, large springs, and highly productive water wells. Climate change, drought, and human population growth along the aquifer corridor are factors causing an increased demand on groundwater resources. In addition, the detrimental effects of climate change threaten the abundance of water within the Edwards Aquifer, thus; managing this resource is essential to ensure the persistence of critical habitat for the threatened and endangered species. The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) is intended to provide assurance that suitable habitat for the threatened and endangered species will remain in spring systems which emanate from the Edwards Aquifer. Those species include the: fountain darter, San Marcos gambusia, Comal Springs dryopid beetle, Comal Springs riffle beetle, Peck's cave amphipod, Texas wild-rice, Texas blind salamander, San Marcos salamander, Texas Cave diving beetle, Comal Springs salamander, and the Texas troglobitic water slater. The species listed in the EAHCP are listed in the Endangered Species Act as either threatened, endangered, or petitioned. The conservation measures implemented in the EAHCP are grouped into three major categories: habitat protection measures, springflow protection measures and supporting measures (i.e., research, refugia, monitoring). These measures are achieved through collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the five cooperating parties listed below.

The EAHCP's Incidental Take Permit (ITP or permit), TE-63663A-1, covers the jurisdictional boundary of the Edwards Aquifer Authority and was issued to five cooperating Permittees:

- Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA)
- City of New Braunfels
- City of San Marcos
- Texas State University
- City of San Antonio acting by and through its San Antonio Water System Board of Trustees

The EAHCP is pursuing the Section 6 HCP Conservation Planning Assistance Grant to support efforts for HCP planning and alternative development, supporting public engagement, and developing requisite documentation (i.e., HCP and NEPA document). Furthermore, grant funds will be used to acquire technical services to assist in the renewal of Incidental Take Permit (ITP) TE-63663A-1 which expires on March 31, 2028 and facilitate climate analysis, listen and learn workshops, potential environmental impact statements, and habitat suitability assessments.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that the EAHCP implements conservation activities past the 2028 expiration of the current ITP. The renewed ITP is intended to continue the accomplishments of the current EAHCP and pursue conservation activities that have the potential to further advance the suitable habitat of the threatened and endangered species that

populate the Edwards Aquifer region. Moreover, the ITP renewal funded by the Section 6 HCP Conservation Planning Assistance Grant will ensure the continuation of groundwater conservation efforts during periods of drought and long-term springflows in the Comal and San Marcos River Systems.