EAHCP STEWARD

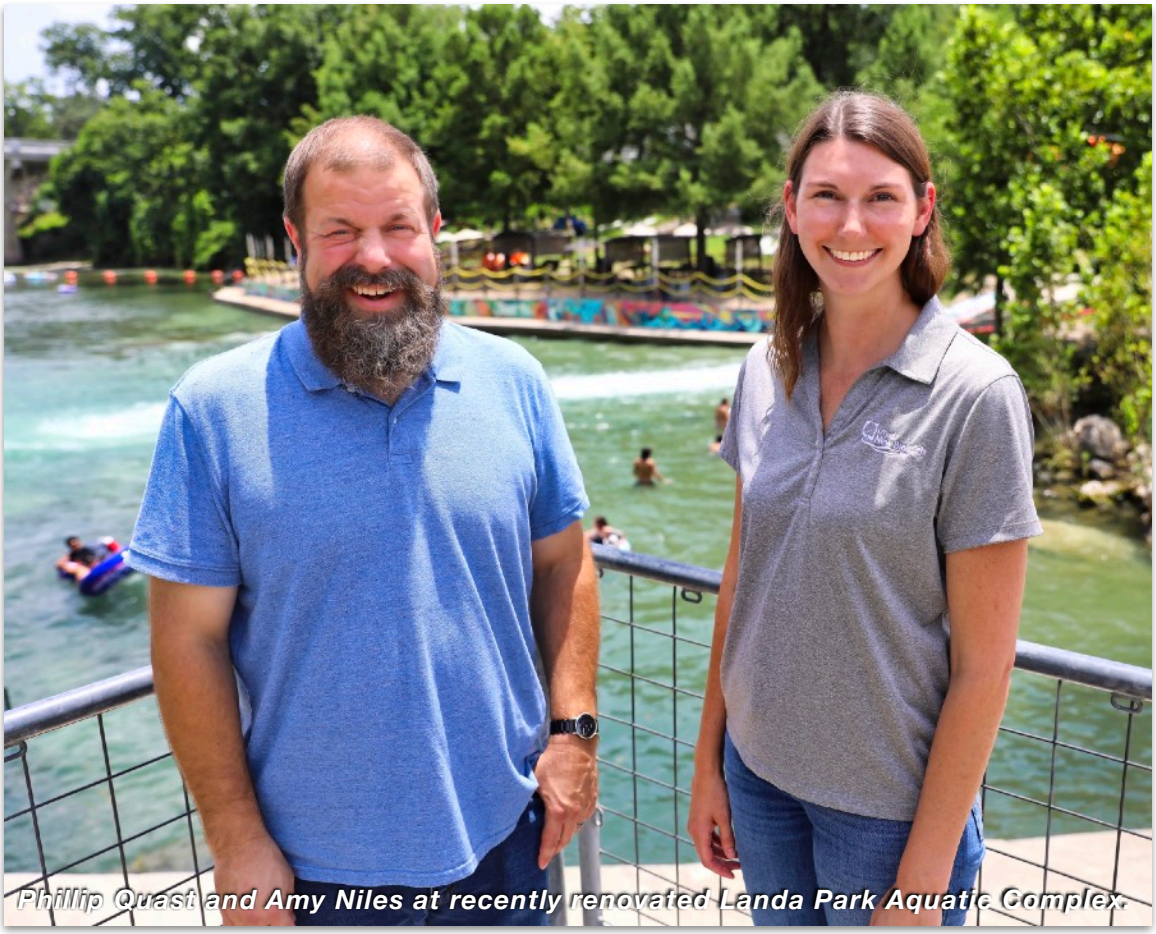
News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - July-August 2025

Peak Recreation, Peak Protection

New Braunfels balancing both river recreation and endangered species protection

The City of New Braunfels is one of the fastest growing cities in Texas and is well-known for its unique blend of historical culture and scenic river recreation along the Comal and Guadalupe rivers. In fact, the Comal River is so popular, it has the highest density of tubing in the state with hundreds of thousands of visitors enjoying the two-mile stretch of that spring-fed waterway each year. While that definitely adds a win in the tourism column, it could be seen as a major challenge to environmental protection efforts with numerous endangered species making their home there. However, New Braunfels embraces both and has developed a river and park management system to strike a nice balance for the fun-loving human species and the endangered aquatic species living in the springs and river.

Peak Recreation, Peak Protection - Continued


Phillip Quast and Amy Niles at recently renovated Landa Park Aquatic Complex.

“There are two rivers here in New Braunfels, the Comal River and the Guadalupe River. When we talk about endangered species protections and other environmental matters, we’re mainly focused on the Comal,” said Amy Niles, River and Watershed Manager for the City of New Braunfels. “In a way, we are fortunate to be able to separate our endangered species protection efforts to restrictions for Landa Lake which is fed by more than 400 Edwards Aquifer spring openings there. Swimming in the lake is prohibited and only a few paddle boats are allowed on the lake. Public access for tubing and swimming is along the New Channel of the Comal River, below Landa Park. So, the majority of our environmental protection work is in Landa Park which is where the Comal Springs are, and recreation happens about a half mile downstream.”

“City ordinances that provide for controlled access to Landa Lake, the spring runs, and the Old Channel of the Comal River are perhaps the best means we have of protecting the endangered species and their habitats,” said Phillip Quast, the City of New Braunfels Watershed Supervisor and Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Program (EAHCP) lead for the City. “Keeping swimmers out of Landa Lake prevents people from trampling the lake bottom where prime endangered species habitat is located. Prohibiting contact recreation in the lake helps to reduce water quality pollution and protects the endangered species.”

Quast also described a major effort by the City and EAHCP team to manage the riparian areas around the lake and upper portions of the Comal River. Over the past decade, the majority of non-native vegetation has been removed and replaced with native vegetation. Wildlife that lives on the land and in the water benefit from the removal of the invasive species. The invasive plant species that have been removed tend to displace the native species and compete the resources the endangered species rely on. This program has successfully progressed to a point of what Quast termed a monthly maintenance type of task.

Floating the Comal River on a Monday afternoon.

“One other major success story people need to be aware of is the work to limit foot traffic near Spring Run Three in Landa Park and an effort to make the parking lots around Landa Park more environmentally friendly,” Quast noted. “In the past, parking lots near Landa would essentially carry unfiltered stormwater runoff into the lake and river. So, over the past several years, the EAHCP has been collaborating with the City to install natural and manmade type filtering and drainage systems for those lots. And those upgrades have been a critical component in allowing us to keep harmful chemicals and other contaminants out of Landa Lake and the Comal River.”

Quast also described an EAHCP-funded project in Landa Park designed to not only keep visitors from trampling the vegetation near Spring Run Three, but to enhance the beauty in the park as well. The project improved a 430-foot long and five- to 10-foot wide buffer along the banks of Spring Run Three. Overall, 572 plants consisting of 11 varieties were installed on the visitor side of the stream. The selected plants were drought and deer tolerant as well as the types that would be found in a native riparian environment. Traditional landscape design techniques were mostly used with the buffer installation, but there were stone-paved gaps created so visitors could get close to the water but with little to no impact on the quality of the water.

“Controlling access to the Comal River where water recreation takes place is also a water quality strategy the City of New Braunfels uses,” Niles commented. “At Hinman Island Park, we maintain a primary river entry point, and 70 percent of annual visitors will enter the river there. Some of the 12 Comal River tubing outfitters upstream of the City’s access point also have sanctioned places for tubers to hop in the river.

“In addition to funneling visitors into limited access points to keep vegetation along the river banks growing and filtering runoff, we also limit items people can bring to the river to prevent litter pollution. There are City employees around river entry points and the Tube Chute to help educate users about the disposable container ban, preventing litter from entering the Comal River in the first place. The City also has a strong focus on water safety by providing life jackets that are free for the public to use.”

Turtles enjoying the tube chute area as well.

One key element to the overall success at balancing recreational and environmental needs that both Niles and Quast emphasized was “collaboration.” Partners such as Texas Parks and Wildlife, Edwards Aquifer Authority, City of San Marcos, Texas State University in San Marcos, Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, New Braunfels Utilities and some private companies like the popular water park, Schlitterbahn and local river outfitters were all acknowledged as critical to the overall success of helping the City of New Braunfels meet their recreation management goals.

“The City of New Braunfels is very proud and protective of Landa Lake, Landa Park and our river recreation areas and so we’re keenly focused on keeping that spring water clean after it flows from the Edwards Aquifer and into the lake and then downstream in the Comal River,” Niles concluded. “We love having visitors in New Braunfels and our city thrives on tourism. But, we are equally invested in protecting our natural resources and making sure they are enjoyed in decades to come.”

Recreation on the Comal River Done Well

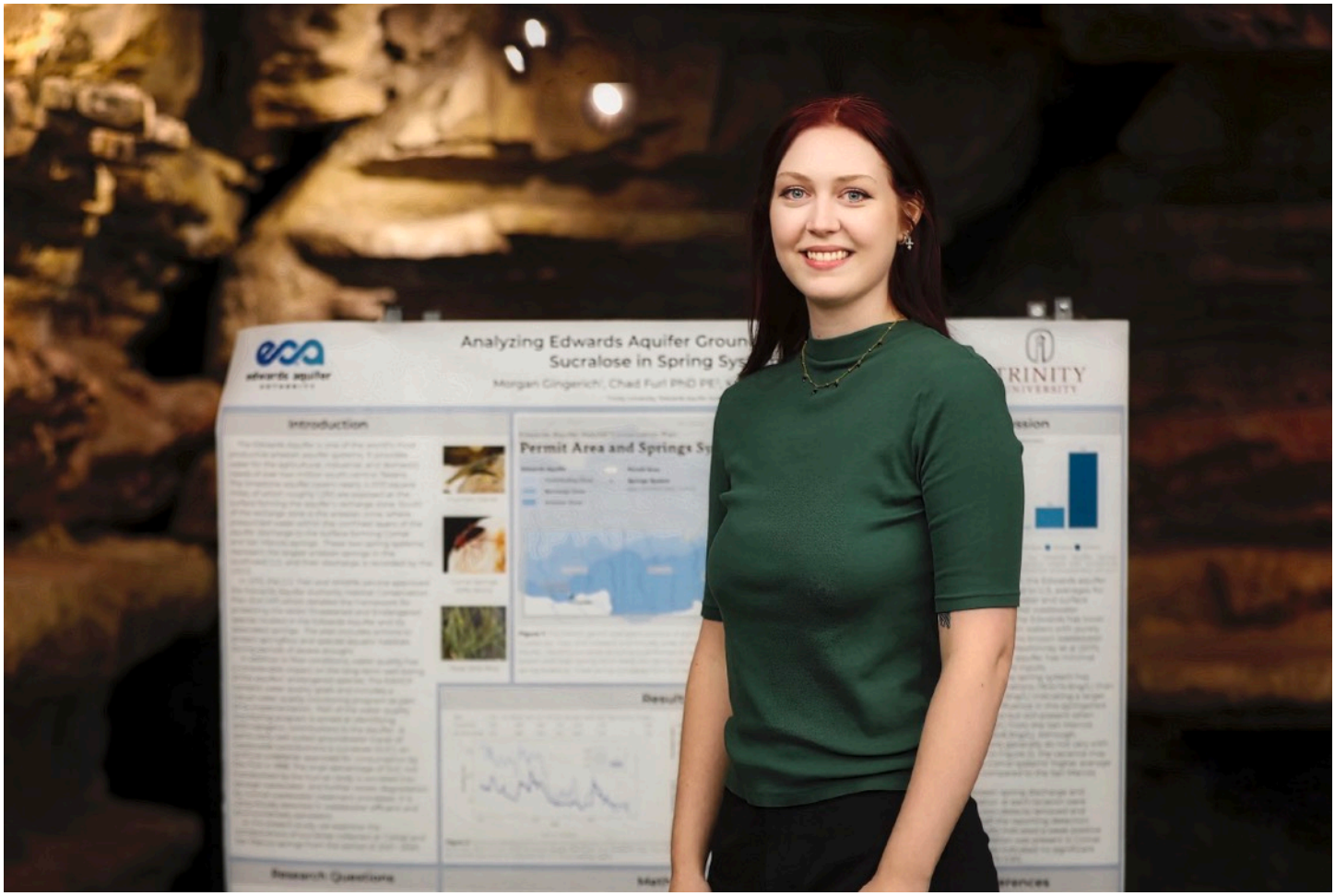
Here are some simple tips for enjoying the Comal River.

- River Outfitters typically have on-site parking at no charge AND they provide shuttle service to and from the river. Contact the outfitter of your choice for more information. Residents of New Braunfels are eligible for a free Resident River Parking Permit, among other resident-only benefits: www.newbraunfels.gov/river
- No Disposable Containers: This includes plastic bottles, aluminum cans, zip-top bags, glass bottles, Styrofoam cups or coolers, cardboard boxes, food wrappers, etc.
- No containers under 5 fluid ounces (including containers for Jello shots)
- Noise devices (radios, boom boxes, speakers, etc.) may not be audible beyond 50 feet
- No jumping from bridges or overpasses
- Only 1 cooler per person, limit of two tubes per person
- Coolers can be no bigger than 30 quarts and must have a locking or latch mechanism
- Tubes or other floatation devices cannot exceed 5 feet (60 inches) in length, width, or diameter; most double tubes are over 5 feet and are not allowed
- Canoes and kayaks cannot be over 18 feet (216 inches) in length and may not use the Last Tubers Exit on weekends and holidays

EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

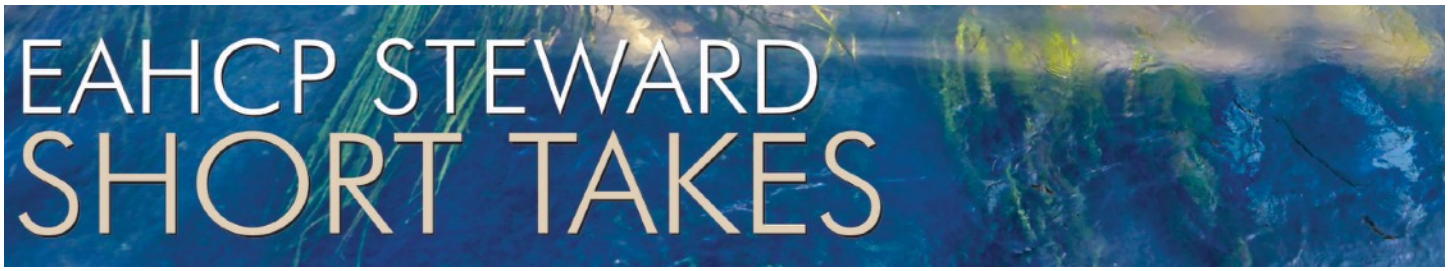
Listen to this month's EAHCP Steward Podcast by clicking here.

Morgan Gingerich Completes Internship with EAHCP



Morgan Gingerich, Environmental Geoscience undergraduate at Trinity University, recently completed her summer internship with the EAHCP team. Her duties included organizing and analyzing biological monitoring data, including water quality data. The EAHCP expanded water quality monitoring program collects and evaluates water quality samples from both the Comal and San Marcos springs systems and is aimed at identifying sources of anthropogenic contributions. Due to its environmental persistence and ubiquitous detection in wastewater effluent, sucralose is particularly well-suited as a groundwater tracer to detect such anthropogenic contributions (through wastewater contamination or recreational usage). During her summer internship, Morgan examined the concentrations of sucralose collected in the Comal and San Marcos springs systems from the period 2021-2025. Her results are summarized in the poster below, the findings summarize trends observed within both springs systems and a possible relationship between springflow and sucralose concentrations.

You can view and download the poster Morgan created by clicking here.



EAHCP Steward Podcast

Listen to this month's EAHCP Steward Podcast by clicking here.
EAHCP Podcast July-August 2025 - Interview with Phillip Quast and Amy Niles.

Upcoming EAHCP Meetings

EAHCP Budget Work Group Meeting

When: Wednesday, September 3
Time: 10:00 AM
Where: Edwards Aquifer Authority
Teams Meeting Link

EAHCP Science Committee Meeting

When: Wednesday, September 10
Time: 9:00 AM
Where: STAR Park in San Marcos, enter left side of building
Teams Meeting Link

Previous Meeting Documents and Videos

Implementing Committee August 7, 2025 Agenda
Implementing Committee August 7, 2025 Meeting Recording

Stakeholder Committee August 7, 2025 Agenda
Stakeholder Committee August 7, 2025 Meeting Recording

EAHCP Meeting Calendar for 2025

Here is the EAHCP meeting calendar for 2025. All meetings will be held in person and online as well.

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HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

2025 EAHCP Committee Meeting Calendar

EAHCP Committee	Date	Time	Location
Stakeholder & Implementing Committee	Thursday, February 6, 2025	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa Community Hall
Science Committee	Wednesday, February 26, 2025	9:00 AM	STAR Park - San Marcos
Implementing Committee	Thursday, March 27, 2025	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority
Science Committee	Thursday, April 17, 2025	9:00 AM	STAR Park - San Marcos
Implementing Committee	Thursday, May 22, 2025	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa Community Hall
Stakeholder & Implementing Committee	Thursday, August 7, 2025	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority
Science Committee	Wednesday, September 10, 2025	9:00 AM	STAR Park - San Marcos
Implementing Committee	Thursday, October 9, 2025	10:00 AM	Pauline Espinosa Community Hall
Stakeholder, Science & Implementing Committee	Thursday, December 18, 2025	10:00 AM	Edwards Aquifer Authority