

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the Edwards Aquifer Dispute,
But Were Afraid to Ask

Abstract

The Edwards Aquifer essentially is the sole source of water for San Antonio, Texas, and the surrounding region, which are home to 1.5 million people. The aquifer contributes surface water flow in the Guadalupe River through Comal and San Marcos Springs, both of which are home to endangered aquatic species. In 1993, Federal District Court Judge Lucius Bunton ruled that the Secretary of the Interior allowed takings under the Endangered Species Act by not ensuring adequate flows from the springs. The Texas legislature responded to a court-mandated deadline to protect springflow by establishing the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) to regulate groundwater withdrawals. The creation of the EAA did not bring an end to the controversy over the management of the Edwards Aquifer. In the most recent attempt to broker a compromise over the management of the aquifer, the region has embarked on a landmark stakeholder effort under the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Plan to avoid a return to the courthouse.