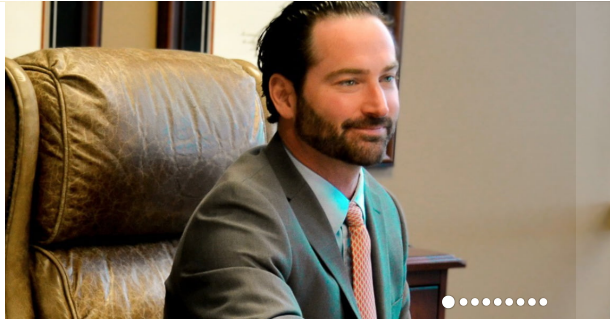


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NEWS // TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Comal County to pursue \$30 million loan to protect land over aquifers

The loan, which would come from the state, could be used to buy land or easements to protect the recharge zones of the Edwards and Trinity aquifers.

By **Liz Teitz**, Staff Writer
Oct 23, 2025

Gift Article



Comal County commissioners voted 3-1 to apply for a \$30 million state loan to create a Water Quality Protection Lands Program.
Stephen Spillman



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Comal County will apply for a \$30 million loan from the state to purchase and protect land on the Edwards and Trinity aquifer watersheds, with county leaders saying they are worried about rapid development and other threats to the county's water supplies.

County commissioners voted 3-1 in favor of the plan to seek the money from the Texas Water Development Board's Clean Water State Revolving Fund. Commissioner Scott Haag voted against it, and County Judge Sherman Krause was absent.

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Water scarcity has become a long-term issue in the county, as the region remains locked in drought. Canyon Lake reached record low levels before this summer's catastrophic flooding, and earlier this year, the private utility Texas Water Company told nine proposed Comal County developments that it didn't have enough water to serve them."

Comal County Commissioner Kevin Webb said the county's move to secure money to protect land from development "has been a long time coming."

"I've worked on a lot of things here," Webb said, "and I don't know if any of them mean more to me than this one."

Webb was elected in 2012, and said in his time on the court, commissioners have approved development of more than 250 subdivisions, which combined account for more than 18,000 lots on more than 12,000 acres. Since 2010, the county's population has nearly doubled from about 108,000 people to more than 200,000, according to census data.

Webb and Commissioner Jen Crownover said they are regularly asked to reject proposed developments and take other steps that are prohibited by state law, because counties' powers are limited in unincorporated areas. The proposed land protection program is a tool they can use to protect land within their authority, they said.

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"By statute, we are approved the things that come through here," Crownover said. She said she's tried to explain to state legislators how Comal County is being "overrun" by development, and needs more authority, "but sadly the legislature continues to make it easier for developers, which is harder for us sitting here, serving you, to face you and say, 'our hands are tied.'"

"This is a huge opportunity," she said. "As it stands right now, we can either be conquered by... high-volume developments or we can play defense, and this is defense."

If approved, the county would use the \$30 million loan to purchase properties or put conservation easements on land that helps recharge the Edwards and Trinity aquifers, two groundwater systems that are key water sources for the county. While the aquifers are made of different types of formations, both are recharged from rainfall on the surface that enters the ground through fractures in the surface.

Easements are agreements that put restrictions on land without changing ownership. They typically are attached to properties in perpetuity, ensuring the land remains in its current state even if it is sold.

The approach wouldn't be unique to Comal County. The city of San Antonio's [Edwards Aquifer Protection Program](#) has protected more than 184,000 acres in the aquifer's recharge and contributing zones since 2000.

READ MORE: [Conservation deal will ban development on 1,200-acre Comal property](#)

Roland Ruiz, general manager of the Edwards Aquifer Authority, called the county's decision "a positive step forward."

San Antonio's protection program has focused on the western parts of the recharge zone in Bexar, Medina and Uvalde counties, and the authority has been looking for ways to replicate that in the eastern part of the watershed in Comal and Hays counties, he said.

"The more people that get involved in conservation easements and the land preservation process, the better," he said.

Webb said up to \$4.5 million of the loan can be forgiven, and that preliminary calculations show an annual payment of about \$1.3 million.

Comal County officials first began considering the project in 2021, when they hired a contractor to prepare the first phase of the request to the water development board, which is the state agency tasked with water planning and management. County Administrator Tom Hornseth said the county received a letter this month from the board inviting it to apply for the funding, the next step in moving the program forward.

If approved, the commissioners will vote again on whether to accept the funding, then begin a process to develop the rules and criteria for using the money.

Webb said after the meeting that the rules for using the funding would rely on technical data and input from experts in the field, "to insulate ourselves from any sort of appearance of impropriety."

"We need to be able to say that we've done our due diligence here," he said.

Haag said he was against the plan because he objects to using property tax dollars for the effort, along with other concerns about its effectiveness and implementation.

"We are under a clamp, constantly, from the state legislature, because our taxes are too high," he said. "And that's exactly what is going to pay for this, property taxes — yours, mine, everybody's."

The commissioners voted unanimously in September to approve a 15% increase to the county's property tax rate, citing major capital projects and necessary salary increases.

READ MORE: [Protecting the Trinity: Why the San Antonio area's other aquifer is so important](#)

"I think the state has failed us," Haag said. "The state is sitting on how many billions of dollars in the Rainy Day Fund... and they come to us for \$30 million and they want us to pay that bill? Are you kidding me? It's ridiculous."

Haag also questioned whether there are "verifiable results" from land protection for water supplies, and said there is only "one thing" that will help the county's water issues: "That is rain, and that is brought by heavenly father," he said. "That is

the only thing that will fill our lakes, make our rivers flow and replenish the aquifers.”

Nineteen Comal County residents and environmental advocates spoke in support of the decision during Thursday’s meeting.

“Water insufficiency is an even greater economic concern for Comal voters than property taxes,” said Leesa Brieger, who lives in Fischer, on the north side of Canyon Lake. “Investing in water security is more economical than allowing water resources to go unprotected and unmanaged.”

Brieger said she and her sister have already put an easement on their ranch to protect it from development, and said the state funding would allow the county to help other families do the same.

Helen Ballew, a co-founder of the nonprofit Comal County Conservation Alliance who initially brought the idea to Webb and the court, said the effort started with a group of residents looking for ways to protect land and water supplies.

The loan will help the county access other funding sources, she said

“This is a really historic vote for Comal County, because it’s a very fiscally conservative community, which I respect,” Ballew said. “But it’s our water future, it’s our land, our nature and recreational opportunities, that’s at risk of being lost if we don’t do something. So this is a really big step for Comal County.”

Oct 23, 2025



Liz Teitz
REPORTER



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Liz joined the Express-News in June 2023. She has been a reporter for eight years, covering housing, government, education and other topics for the Ouray County Plaindealer, Hearst Connecticut Media Group and the Beaumont Enterprise. Liz grew up in Rhode Island and graduated from Georgetown University.